
PRICE $8.99
THE NEW YORKER
MAY 22, 2023

VISIT…

LANZAROTE Caliente.com



WHAT MAKES A ROLEX A ROLEX?

It's not the wheels and cogs. It's not the steel we shape nor the gold we forge. It's not the sum of every single part that we design, craft, polish and assemble with countless skills and constant care. It's the time it takes. The numerous days and months that are necessary until we can print this single word on each individual dial leaving our workshops: ***"Superlative."*** It's the mark of our autonomy, responsibility and integrity. This is all we make, but we make it all. So that, in time, you can make it your own.

#Perpetual

ROLEX

FOR AN OFFICIAL ROLEX JEWELER VISIT ROLEX.COM. ROLEX AND ♛ ARE ® TRADEMARKS. NEW YORK

THE NEW YORKER

MAY 22, 2023

4 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

15 THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Jeannie Suk Gersen on Clarence Thomas and ethics; Carole King goes to Washington; a beloved bartender; the sound of comedic music; elevating small talk.

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

Adam Iscoe 20 The Revolving Door

New York City's homelessness and mental-illness crisis.

SHOUTS & MURMURS

Ian Frazier 27 Translation

THE WORLD OF FASHION

Naomi Fry 28 The Bling King

Philipp Plein's maximalist designs.

A REPORTER AT LARGE

Tad Friend 34 Hunting the Hunters

The fight against international wildlife trafficking.

LETTER FROM THE U.K.

Sam Knight 46 Chaos Theory

How a disaster expert prepares for the worst.

FICTION

Nicole Krauss 56 "Long Island"

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

Adam Gopnik 64 *The case against cars.*

Jeannie Suk Gersen 69 *Defamation laws and democracy.*

73 Briefly Noted

ON TELEVISION

Inkoo Kang 74 *"Queen Charlotte."*

POEMS

Cynthia Zarin 40 "To Astraeus"

Paul Muldoon 60 "The MRI"

COVER

R. Kikuo Johnson "Perennial"

DRAWINGS *Sam Gross, Hartley Lin, Andy Friedman, Matt Reuter, Tom Toro, Tim Hamilton, Asher Perlman, Frank Cotham, Jason Adam Katzenstein, Amy Kurzweil, Juan Astasio, E. S. Glenn, David Sipress, Jack Ziegler, Daniel Kanhai, Roz Chast, Edward Frascino* SPOTS *Christoph Abbrederis*



Your name can live on as a champion of the causes, communities, and places dear to you...for generations to come.

THE NEW YORK COMMUNITY TRUST

Kickstart your charitable legacy with NYC's community foundation.
giving@nyct-cfi.org
(212) 686-0010 x363

giveto.nyc

CONTRIBUTORS

Tad Friend (*"Hunting the Hunters," p. 34*) has been a staff writer since 1998. He published a memoir about trying to connect with his father, "In the Early Times: A Life Reframed," last year.

Adam Iscoe (*"The Revolving Door," p. 20*) is a writer based in New York City.

Hannah Goldfield (*Tables for Two, p. 13*), the magazine's food critic, has contributed to *The New Yorker* since 2010.

R. Kikuo Johnson (*Cover*) is an artist and the author of, most recently, "No One Else." In March, he became the first person to win a Whiting Award for graphic fiction.

Cynthia Zarin (*Poem, p. 40*), a regular contributor to the magazine since 1983, teaches at Yale. Her forthcoming books are "Inverno," a novel, and "Next Day: New and Selected Poems."

Nicole Krauss (*Fiction, p. 56*) is the author of five books, including the novel "Forest Dark" and the story collection "To Be a Man."

Sam Knight (*"Chaos Theory," p. 46*) is a staff writer based in London. His first book, "The Premonitions Bureau: A True Account of Death Foretold," was published in 2022.

Naomi Fry (*"The Bling King," p. 28*) became a staff writer for the magazine in 2018 and writes about popular culture for newyorker.com.

Sam Gross (*Cartoon, p. 18*), who died earlier this month, contributed cartoons to *The New Yorker* for more than five decades.

Jeannie Suk Gersen (*Comment, p. 15; Books, p. 69*) is a contributing writer for the magazine and a professor at Harvard Law School.

Ian Frazier (*Shouts & Murmurs, p. 27*), a staff writer, most recently published "Cranial Fracking," a collection of humor pieces.

Sheila Yasmin Marikar (*The Talk of the Town, p. 19*) published her début novel, "The Goddess Effect," in October.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



UNDER REVIEW
David S. Wallace on Hernan Diaz's Pulitzer-winning novel, "Trust," and other fiction about finance.



PHOTO BOOTH
After years of catastrophic drought, California's Superbloom is a glimpse of the past, Dana Goodyear writes.

LEFT: RICARDO TOMÁS; RIGHT: IOULEX

Download the New Yorker app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

THE MAIL

PLAYING WITH FOOD

Antonia Hitchens, in her article about Taco Bell's food-innovation staff, states that the company Dairy Management Inc. "was behind" the idea for Pizza Hut's cheese-stuffed crust ("The Crunch Bunch," April 24th & May 1st). I worked at Pizza Hut from 1992 to 1995, and I was in the Pizza Hut R. & D. kitchens on the day the stuffed-crust pizza was conceived. The credit for this invention should go to Patty Scheibmeir, who had the idea to put something tasty inside the edge of the pizza. (She even tried apple filling, as part of a combination entrée and dessert for the engineers who lurked around the R. & D. kitchens at lunchtime.) The eventual rollout of the Stuffed Crust Pizza was the result of an incredibly talented multidisciplinary product-development team in collaboration with operations staff and key suppliers, whose innovations in cheese manufacturing and in dough technology allowed the cheese to have the right shape and melting properties, and the dough to stretch around the cheese without breaking, while also providing a golden-brown crust.
Barbara Timm-Brock
San Jose, Calif.

FERTILITY'S PAST AND FUTURE

I am the author of "The Slow Moon Climbs," a history of menopause, published by Princeton University Press, and I was fascinated by Emily Witt's reporting on biotech startups that are committed to extending female fertility ("Fertile Ground," April 24th & May 1st). But I was alarmed at what the piece revealed about the gap in knowledge between scientists and physicians, on one side, and, on the other, anthropologists, evolutionary biologists, and historians. Some of the scientists quoted by Witt suggest that menopause is an unfortunate feature of human life, perhaps originating in an unnatural extension of the human life span in modern times. But, as many evolutionary biologists convincingly argue, menopause likely evolved because it was beneficial to our species. As humans' natural life spans lengthened beyond the chimpanzee's forty-five years, sometime after our divergence from a common ancestor, reproductive life in women did not lengthen to match it, because the energy surplus that menopause granted to post-reproductive women was so useful: it could be invested in helping children, grandchildren, and other people, or diverted to undertakings (technology, culture) that would be advantageous for the species. It is my hope that scientists working on reproductive technology take a broader, more holistic view of the problems they are trying to solve—some of which might not be problems at all.
Susan Mattern
Distinguished Research Professor of History
University of Georgia
Athens, Ga.

Reading Witt's piece alongside Antonia Hitchens's article about Taco Bell's food-innovation staff, I was struck by the irony of a company pouring enormous amounts of money into crafting fast-food products while, because of a historical lack of interest (and a corresponding lack of research funding), we still have many questions about how something as elemental as the female reproductive system works. It seems to me that, in a society that encompasses different values and incentives, we might pursue research on women's reproductive health with much more zeal, and be able to offer women more and better health-care choices as a result. Instead, we have access to optimally crunchy tacos for under five dollars.
Heather Silva
Goleta, Calif.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

For every…

thaw
awakening
bloom
new beginning
metamorphosis
shedding of layers
birdsong
first warm day
soft rain
fresh start
sense of renewal
springtime

…there is a color



glassybaby
one of a kindness®

made by hand in the USA
glassybaby.com/thenewyorker

SUMMER PREVIEW

MAY 17 – 23, 2023

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The triumphant installation by the L.A. phenom **Lauren Halsey** on the Met's roof, on view through Oct. 22, is clearly related to the museum's Temple of Dendur, constructed in ancient Nubia. The faces of the sphinxes attending Halsey's piece—"the eastside of south central los angeles hieroglyph prototype architecture (I)"—are modelled on members of the artist's family, a majestic reunion of the living and the ancestral. As one of the many inscriptions on the walls of the sculpture reads, "We Are Still Here."

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUS POWELL

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

THE THEATRE

Tartuffe or the Hypocrite

Molière's 1664 lampoon of religiosity premièred to such furor that it was banned after the first performance. The original script, lost to history after the playwright revised it for palatability, has been reconstructed; it now makes its English-language début, translated by Maya Slater, in a free outdoor production by Molière in the Park, a nonprofit dedicated to expanding theatre access. The play—about a rich patriarch conned by a lowlife's sanctimoniousness—is both a logical and a challenging choice for M.I.P.'s mission. Hypocrisy remains a depressingly poignant theme, as the recent publication of Tucker Carlson's Trump-bashing texts attests. But "Tartuffe"'s director, Lucie Tiberghien, doesn't make such parallels explicit, so it falls mainly to the actors to convey not just meaning but relevance—in rhyming couplets, no less. Impressively, many do, especially Matthew Rauch, as the devilishly clever titular character.—*Dan Stahl (LeFrak Center at Lakeside, in Prospect Park; through May 27.)*

White Girl in Danger

Michael R. Jackson's musical, directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz, is, among other things, an R-rated soap-opera satire, a gonzo investigation of race, and a Wagnerian epic about the whiteness of influences from the author's youth. It's also a three-hour train wreck—with all the excitement that promises. Within the reality of a soap opera called "White Girl in Danger," Allwhite is the town (and mind-set) where primary story lines happen; the show's Black people live in (and existentially constitute) the Blackground. In a Pirandellian move, the Blackground character Keesha (Latoya Edwards) annexes several white women's stories, but she collides with the concerns of both her mother, Nell (Tarra Conner Jones, miraculous), and the Allwhite Writer, who shifts her fate to please himself. Eventually, after the careering plotline has addressed a Presidency, multiple dildos, and a serial killer gone mad, an avatar of the playwright himself appears, to explain his conflicting impulses. Later versions will surely be more coherent, but even in this still liquid iteration it's clear that Jackson is a hypergenerative musical-theatre rarity, willing, as he was in "A Strange Loop," to let us overhear the voices that drive him.—*Helen Shaw (Reviewed in our issue of 4/24 & 5/1/23.) (Tony Kiser Theatre; through May 21.)*

DANCE

New York City Ballet

Double bills of longer works are becoming more common at New York City Ballet, and that is a good thing. Two substantial ballets, separated by a single intermission, make

SUMMER PREVIEW

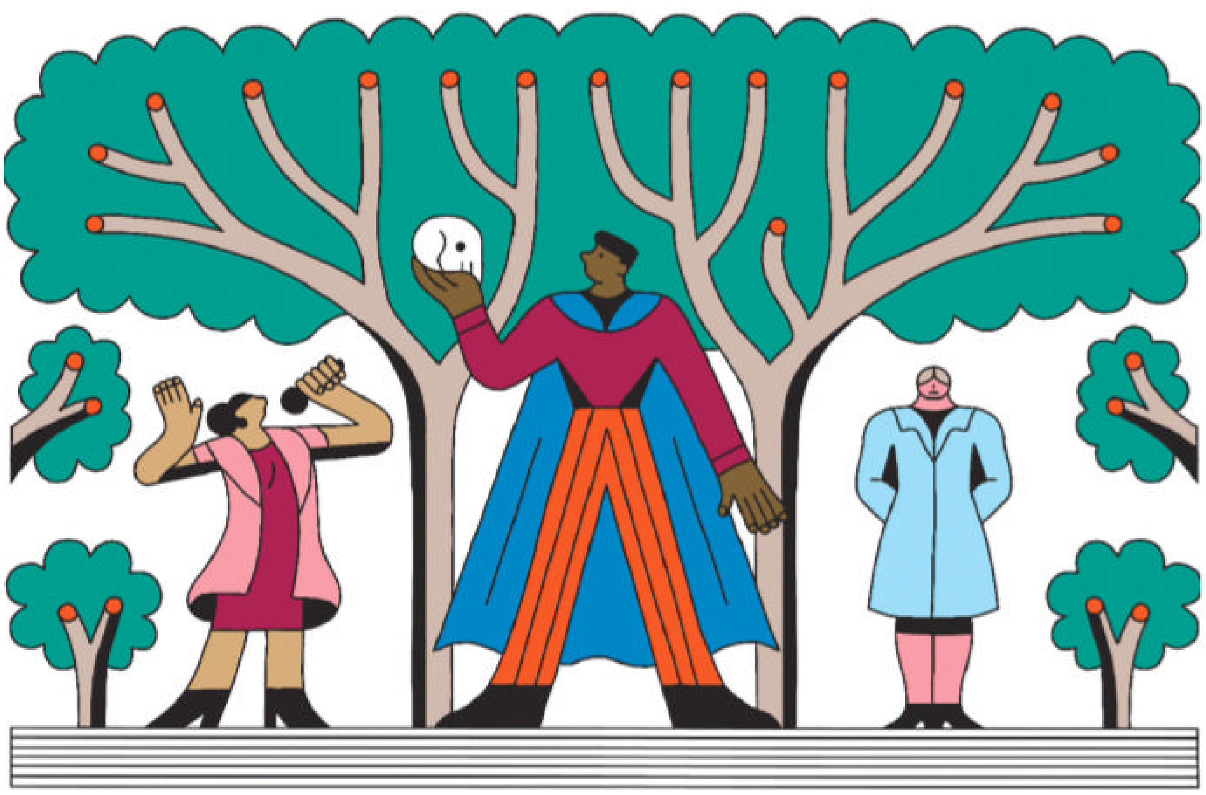
David Byrne, "Hamlet" in the Park, "The Doctor"

Compared with the clamor of the spring theatre season, summer is quiet and peaceful. But New York won't be sleepy, not by any means. For one of the year's most anticipated international imports, the Park Avenue Armory welcomes back the British director Robert Icke (of last year's "Hamlet"), who brings **"The Doctor"** (beginning June 3), his adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's "Professor Bernhardi," from 1912. The thorny ethical drama stars Juliet Stevenson as a Jewish doctor, who is pilloried after she refuses a priest's request to administer last rites. Another overseas visitor is **"Good Vibrations"** (Irish Arts Center, June 14), the Lyric Theatre Belfast's production of Colin Carberry and Glenn Patterson's seventies-set musical, which uses songs from Northern Ireland's punk era to spread the good (or, rather, loud) word.

The Public's Shakespeare in the Park offers only a single production this year: a modern-day **"Hamlet"** (Delacorte, June 8), starring Ato Blankson-Wood, directed by Kenny Leon. Blankson-Wood, who was nominated for a Tony for his performance in Jeremy O. Harris's "Slave Play," reveals a particular electric vulnerability onstage; it will be thrilling to see what he does with Hamlet's fever pitch. And what was the last time that Tennessee Williams's **"Orpheus Descending"** (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, July 9) was given a serious New York production? The glittering Maggie Siff ("Mad Men," "Billions") stars in the superheated Southern drama at Brooklyn's Theatre for a New Audience, where she scorched the boards as Beatrice in "Much Ado About Nothing," in 2013—it's a welcome return on several fronts.

Broadway, of course, marches on. The most edifying opening this summer may well be **"Here Lies Love"** (Broadway Theatre, June 17), an immersive musical by David Byrne and Fatboy Slim that originated at the Public, about the Filipino politician Imelda Marcos's rise to power. The director Alex Timbers and the choreographer Annie-B Parson will get audiences dancing—an experience meant to fuse the ecstasy of the club with demagogic delirium. Off and Off Off Broadway bubble with innovative projects as well, particularly **"The Whitney Album"** (May 24), a meditation on Whitney Houston by the movement-forward theatre-maker Jillian Walker, which closes the SoHo Rep's season. And the Tony-nominated playwright Lucas Hnath mounts **"A Simulacrum"** (Atlantic Stage 2, May 25), in which he examines the craft of the sleight-of-hand expert Steve Cuiffo, his longtime collaborator. The details of the show are—as you might expect—being kept very close to the vest.

—*Helen Shaw*



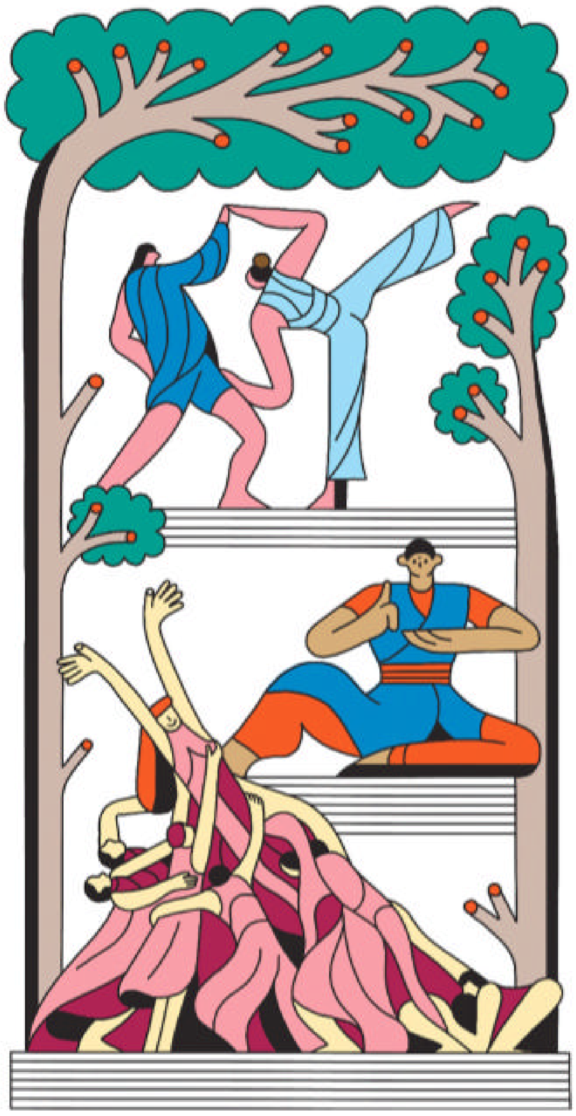
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CRISTINA SPANÒ

SUMMER PREVIEW

Al-Fresco Dance, Mark Morris, A.B.T.

In the summer, opportunities to see dance—and to shake a leg—in the open air proliferate. By mid-June, the main plaza at Lincoln Center, normally a redoubt of monumental calm, will be outfitted with a dance floor. Evenings of social dancing to salsa, swing, and soul music are all part of the center's **Summer for the City** programming (June 14-Aug. 12). But, if you'd rather watch than participate, the **BAAND Together Dance Festival** returns to Damrosch Park (July 25-29), with shared bills by Ballet Hispánico, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, and Dance Theatre of Harlem.

A few steps beyond the crowds salsa-ing the night away, **American Ballet Theatre** holds its summer season, at the Metropolitan Opera House (June 22-July 22). It kicks off with the première of a three-act ballet by Christopher Wheeldon, his first for the company in more than a decade. Wheeldon, a familiar name on Broadway as well as in the world of ballet, is not afraid to go big. His new piece "Like Water for Chocolate" is a fast-moving epic, based on Laura Esquivel's novel, from 1989, in which forbidden love finds its expression through the magical powers of food.



Justin Peck specializes in depictions of Americana, as seen in his choreography for everything from ballets to Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story." His newest project, **"Illinois"** (Bard's Fisher Center, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., June 23-July 2), is musical theatre driven by dance. It's based on Sufjan Stevens's 2005 album of the same name, and its plot, developed in conjunction with the playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury, is derived from the album's songs, fashioned like a series of campfire tales.

The **Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival** (Becket, Mass., June 28-Aug. 27), which has occupied its idyllic spot in the Berkshires since the nineteen-thirties, offers dance both indoors and out. The Henry J. Leir stage, with a panoramic view and shady trees, is a most suitable spot for the excellent Mythili Prakash's one-woman show "She's Auspicious," an exploration of femininity in classical Indian dance (July 21). The Dutch National Ballet appears in the shed-like Ted Shawn Theatre (July 5-9); among the company's dancers is the extraordinary Olga Smirnova, who left Russia and the Bolshoi Ballet in protest of Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine.

Mark Morris Dance Group brings its founder's evening-length tribute to Burt Bacharach, "The Look of Love," to the Pillow (June 28-July 2). But Morris's famously musical dancers will also appear closer to home, in their first-ever run at the Joyce (Aug. 1-12). The company's two programs include one of Morris's earliest works, "Castor and Pollux," from 1980, alongside the wonderfully idiosyncratic "A Wooden Tree," which is set to songs by the Scottish eccentric Ivor Cutler; there's also a new work, "A minor Dance," to Bach.

—*Marina Harss*

for a satisfying whole. A doubleheader on May 19, May 20 evening, and May 21 pairs Balanchine's one-act précis of "Swan Lake" with Alexei Ratmansky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," from 2014, one of the choreographer's most original works. The suite of dances, inspired by Mussorgsky's 1874 piano suite of the same name, evokes the experience of walking through a gallery of paintings. Like Mussorgsky's musical miniatures, Ratmansky's dances create moving images: a sorcerer stirring up spells, a pair of pilgrims lost in the dark, a swallow diving and flitting through the air. The week also offers more opportunities to catch Justin Peck's seventy-six-minute "Copland Dance Episodes," in which Peck uses three of Copland's best-known dance scores ("Rodeo," "Appalachian Spring," and "Billy the Kid") to create an image of youthful freedom and exuberance, punctuated by occasional melancholia.—*Marina Harss (David H. Koch Theatre; through May 29.)*

Gibney Company

Since reinventing itself, a few years ago, as a contemporary-repertory troupe along the lines of Nederlands Dans Theatre (flexible dancers, works on the shallow side of trendy), Gibney has been performing often. It returns to the Joyce with "Ghost Town," by the choreographers Tiffany Tregarthen and David Raymond, whose works for their own Vancouver-based group, Out Innerspace Dance Theatre, tend to lean on dramatic lighting. "SARA," by Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar, combines mannered oddity with lip-synching, and Johan Inger's "Bliss" tries to match the improvisational finesse of its score, part of Keith Jarrett's "Köln Concert."—*Brian Seibert (Joyce Theatre; May 17-21.)*

Live Ideas

This year's iteration of the annual festival, called "Planet Justice: Are You Here for It?," focusses on the intersection of climate justice and social justice, with events co-curated by the environmental- and social-justice nonprofit Slow Factory. Among its many offerings is the world première of "Hello, Buffalo," by Daina Ashbee, an Indigenous choreographer from British Columbia, whose work is known for its extremity. The new piece, a solo performed naked by Imara Bosco, ventures to push past human consciousness, into the experience of animals.—*B.S. (New York Live Arts; May 18-19.)*

MUSIC

Kirk Degiorgio, "Modal Forces / Percussive Forces"

ELECTRONIC The British dance-music producer and d.j. Kirk Degiorgio has worked in many styles and under many aliases since the early nineties, usually foregrounding vintage synthesizers. It's no surprise, then, that "Modal Forces / Percussive Forces" explicitly mimics the tangy library music—anonymous tracks intended for use in the background on TV and in film—of the European seventies. (The format was also a notable influence on the bands


No. 1 | Six-part series of global actions
WE SAVE SEA TURTLES
BY SAVING THEM MONEY
Ocean ecosystems are in a critical state. That's why we're thinking big. By helping island and coastal nations refinance their national debt and put some of those savings towards large-scale, nature-positive projects, we can conserve 4 million square kilometers of ocean. That's an area larger than India. Together, with financial and community collaboration, we find a way.
Help support global action at nature.org
The Nature Conservancy

SUMMER PREVIEW

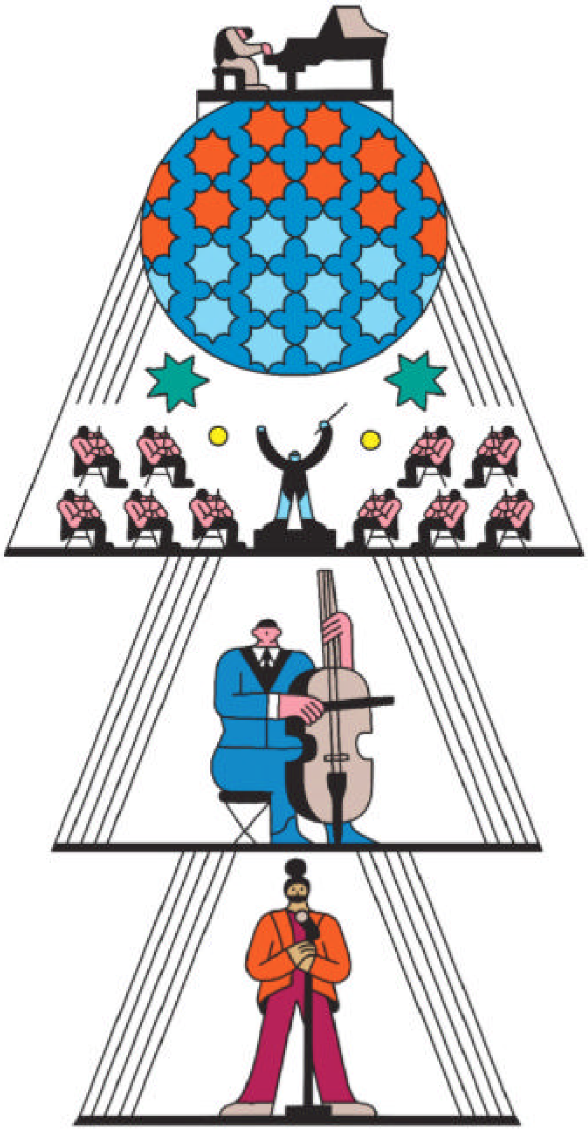
Louis Langrée, the Shed's Sonic Sphere, Tanglewood

Every Memorial Day weekend, **Death of Classical** presents a concert on the rolling grounds of Green-Wood Cemetery, with food, drink, and an alliterative title. This year's festivities, "Tacos, Tequila & Tavener's 'Protecting Veil,'" pair mezcal tastings with the searching spirituality of Tavener's piece for solo cello and string ensemble (May 26).

Also decamping to more pastoral environs, the **New York Philharmonic** (June 13-16) and the **Metropolitan Opera** (select dates June 20-30) travel to parks across the boroughs, bearing gifts from the standard repertory (for the Phil, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; for the Met, Verdi and Puccini arias).

With the Philharmonic away, Lincoln Center's **Summer for the City** takes over David Geffen Hall. The pluralistic programming includes **"Octavia E. Butler's 'Parable of the Sower'"** (July 13-14), a genre-crossing stage adaptation of Butler's Afrofuturist writing, and **Louis Langrée's** valedictory season with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra. Bittersweet notes color the Maestro's farewell after twenty-one years, with Mozart's doleful yet consoling Mass in C Minor (July 25-26) and his final three resplendent symphonies (Aug. 11-12). Around the corner, at Alice Tully Hall, the **Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center**—solid and unshowy—returns, with four evenings of Boccherini, Poulenc, Mozart, and more (select dates July 9-18).

At Hudson Yards, the singular pianist **Igor Levit** helps to christen the Shed's flashy Sonic Sphere. This suspended concert hall—inspired by a vision of Karlheinz Stockhausen's—lofts Levit, and the audience, in a globe more than thirty feet off the ground, as he delves into the deep meditations of Morton Feldman's "Palais de Mari" (June 30-July 1). Little Island, another recent addition to the West Side, hosts two captivating Broadway singers—the vocal acrobat **Mykal Kilgore** (July 1, July 8, and July 15) and the powerhouse **Joshua Henry** (Aug. 5 and Aug. 12). Both are in the Glade, an intimate corner of the park.



Teatro Nuovo affirms its single-minded obsession with bel-canto opera—its Web site includes a treatise on period style—with Donizetti's "Poliuto" (July 19) and Federico and Luigi Ricci's "Crispino e la Comare" (July 20), both at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Theatre. **Bard SummerScape** stages Saint-Saëns's lushly orchestrated "Henri VIII," in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. (select dates July 21-30).

Tanglewood, the **Boston Symphony Orchestra's** summer home, in the Berkshires, will celebrate the hundred-and-fiftieth birthday of Serge Koussevitzky, one of the orchestra's legendary music directors, in 2024, but his fingerprints are discernible this season in the Prokofiev works that he championed: the Third Piano Concerto, with the formidable soloist **Daniil Trifonov** (July 7), and the Fifth Symphony, whose uplifting strains are both hallowed and complex (Aug. 19).

—*Oussama Zahr*

Stereolab and Broadcast.) What might catch the listener off guard about Degiorgio's album is how imbued it is with adoration for the sound. He loves library music's brevity—half the songs here are under two minutes—and his music's rich and easy grooves and synth coloration liberate it from the form's programmatic style.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Streaming on select platforms.)*

Gene Bertoncini & Roni Ben-Hur

JAZZ With youthful, fleet-fingered practitioners crowding the bandstands, jazz guitar is in the midst of a renaissance. But it's wise to lend an ear to a mature grand master like Gene Bertoncini, who has elegance, economy, and, above all, lyrical beauty to impart. Now eighty-six years old, Bertoncini has built an unimpeachable reputation as a musician's musician, weaving six-string magic in the company of a dizzying mélange of artists, including Nancy Wilson, Astrud Gilberto, Tony Bennett, and Chet Baker. (Appropriate attention must also be paid to Bertoncini's suggestive work on Wayne Shorter's 1970 opus, "The Odyssey of Iska.") Bertoncini relies on considered melody as his armor, and his silken tone is on abundant display whether he's caressing a classical or an electric instrument. Onstage, the guitar avatar is joined by the Israeli expatriate guitarist Roni Ben-Hur, a bop-inspired stylist and a loyal Bertoncini collaborator, who shares the elder musician's predilection for enduring songbook standards and Brazilian gems.—*Steve Futterman (Zinc Bar; May 22.)*

Leila Bordreuil & Luke Stewart: New Works for Feedback Ensemble

EXPERIMENTAL New York City has a rich history of musicians flocking to its bridges—including Sonny Rollins's legendary practice sessions on the Williamsburg Bridge and more recent D.I.Y. gigs by underground artists—to play atop their spans and in their shadows below. The Feedback Ensemble, started by the sound artist and cellist Leila Bordreuil and the bassist Luke Stewart, in 2020, adds to this tradition with a collaborative performance at an open-air amphitheatre under the Kosciuszko Bridge, in Greenpoint. The seven-piece ensemble includes the drummer Chris Corsano, the trumpeter Nate Wooley, the guitarist Nina Garcia, and the multi-instrumentalists C. Spencer Yeh and Julia Santoli. Assembling in view of the Newtown Creek, this formidable unit explores the possibilities of audio feedback, via their instruments and "their own feedback apparatuses," unleashing a cacophony of sound from collectively composed graphic scores, improvisation, and, perhaps, the imposing venue itself.—*Jenn Pelly (Under the "K" Bridge Park; May 18.)*

Caroline Polachek

POP In the years since disbanding her group, Chairlift, the singer-songwriter Caroline Polachek has become even more of a pop eccentric. In 2017, she appeared on the fitful Charli XCX mixtape "Pop 2"; in 2019, she worked

FYC IN ALL CATEGORIES INCLUDING

OUTSTANDING LIMITED OR ANTHOLOGY SERIES

Critics' Pick

“‘BEEF’ FLOORS THE ACCELERATOR WITH HEEDLESS GUSTO.”

The New York Times JAMES PONIEWOZIK



N

FYC.NETFLIX.COM



SUMMER PREVIEW

Beyoncé, Madonna, the Moldy Peaches

For those who prefer their headliners glitzy, venerated, and operating without a surname, the coming months are a bonanza, as a pileup of divas shimmy through area sports facilities. **Beyoncé,** the reigning top seed, absent from solo touring for six years—a pop century—descends upon MetLife Stadium (July 29-30). A month later, **Madonna,** the living eminence most responsible for shaping the current pop-star cast, draws the season to a close, at Madison Square Garden (Aug. 23-24 and Aug. 26-27).

Those deities are not the only performers whose very names seem written in fireworks. **Drake** returns to local stages, at Barclays Center (July 17-18 and July 20-21) and at M.S.G. (July 23 and July 25-26). Governors Ball takes over Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, with artists including **Lizzo, Kendrick Lamar,** and **Lil Nas X** (June 9-11). **Cardi B** fronts Hot 97's Summer Jam, at UBS Arena (June 4).

Yet for all the razzle-dazzle of its stadium offerings, the season brims with quirkier charms. **Metallica** headlines MetLife Stadium (Aug. 4 and Aug. 6), but listeners can also revel in a subtler brand of guitar heroism when **the Feelies,** magical indie forerunners born to the same era, play Brooklyn Made (June 16-17). **Jonas Brothers** continue their reunion, at Yankee Stadium (Aug. 12-13), but days earlier **the Moldy Peaches,** by far the most original band to emerge from early-two-thousands New York, headline their first U.S. shows in two decades, at Brooklyn Steel (Aug. 10-11). And, as **Dead & Company** take their final bow (Citi Field, June 21-22), more colorful paths to transcendence might be charted via **Bitchin Bajas** (Church of the Heavenly Rest, June 3), **the Flaming Lips** (Kings Theatre, June 8), and **Panda Bear & Sonic Boom** (Knockdown Center, July 21).

As anyone who has recently mortgaged his home for floor seats can attest, the splashier events don't come cheap—those Beyoncé tickets seem priced to foment a socialist revolution. But many of the summer's richest experiences are egalitarian. Standouts at SummerStage, in Central Park, include the indie phenoms **Horsegirl** (July 20) and the Tuareg guitarist **Mdou Moctar** (July 29). Lincoln Center hosts a breadth of artists at Damrosch Park, among them the songwriter **Aimee Mann** (July 30) and the veteran rapper **Rakim** (Aug. 12). And Celebrate Brooklyn!, which opens its season with the eminent bluesman **Taj Mahal** (June 7), welcomes a bona-fide underground titan, **John Cale** (Aug. 19). All the concerts bear an inflation-defying ticket price—zilch.

—Jay Ruttenberg

closely with Danny L Harle on her experimental third album, "Pang"; and, last year, she toured with the retro diva Dua Lipa. All that work coalesces in Polachek's new album, "Desire, I Want to Turn Into You," which is inspired as much by Enya and Donna Lewis as by Timbaland and Ennio Morricone. The record is a spellbindingly deranged collage that pairs the electro-pop fabulist Grimes with the down-tempo maven Dido, swings from trip-hop to dembow, and features bagpipes, Spanish guitar, robo raps, and a children's choir. On her tour, Polachek unwinds her sprawling sound in pursuit of pure impulse. Ethel Cain opens, with haunted songs surveying religious Americana.*—Sheldon Pearce (Radio City Music Hall; May 20.)*

ART

"Chryssa & New York"

When this Greek-born artist—whose vision and inventive rigor are only now getting their due—first arrived in New York City, in the mid-nineteen-fifties, the lights and skyscrapers of Times Square made a lasting impression. Responding to the architecture, the advertising, and the street signage, Chryssa drew striking connections between ancient cultures and blinking neon—a medium that she put to profoundly good use in her work. This survey, which covers the period from 1955 to 1975 (the artist died in Athens in 2013), opens with work from the sixties, including "The Gates to Times Square," from 1964-66, a monumental, partially illuminated sculpture made out of plexiglass and metal building blocks, and letters salvaged from discarded signs. Taking the form of a cleaved letter "A," the gridded structure evokes a modern-day ziggurat—or, given its use of language, a Tower of Babel. Although the concerns of Minimalism are certainly reflected in Chryssa's embrace of industrial materials, she can also be seen as a Pop artist, thanks to her distillation of commercial graphics. But the artist's early pieces, which fill a cavernous space here, underscore her abiding interest in what might best be described as human fascinations. In contrast to her flashing, plugged-in works, the geometric, all-white reliefs of Chryssa's early "Cycladic Book" series, from the fifties, involve natural light—quiet timekeeping reliant on the movement of the sun.*—Johanna Fateman (Dia Chelsea; through July 23.)*

Daniel Gordon

A twenty-three-foot-long still-life spans this New York artist's latest exhibition, "Free Transform." Its ultra-bright backdrop and array of subjects (houseplants, floral bouquets, fruits, vegetables, lobsters) suggest elements in a giant Colorforms set. The piece is named for a Photoshop tool that allows for fluid image manipulation—but digital editing is only one stage of Gordon's idiosyncratic layering process, which relies on a variety of photographic sources. Images are printed, cut out, and rephotographed into tableaux. For all their grounding in photography, Gordon's pieces invite painterly comparisons: his composites are like

stripped-down versions of seventeenth-century Dutch tabletop still-lifes, rendered in a Fauvist palette. The exhibition also marks the début of Gordon's sculptures: urns, pitchers, and vases, whose surfaces appear to be patchworked with ink-jet prints. These objects have a metamorphic, even magical presence, as if the wave of a wand had plucked the most charming props from Gordon's collagelike compositions to show them off in three dimensions.—*J.F. (Kasmin; through June 3.)*

"Signals: How Video Transformed the World"

Utopian visions mingle with dystopian nightmares in this ambitious exhibition about the video revolution—a global story of formal radicalism and political struggle. Thanks to the curators Stuart Comer and Michelle Kuo, "Signals" unfolds gracefully, albeit unchronologically, with careful consideration given to the inevitable demands on a viewer's time (and senses) which such a deluge of moving-image work presents. Near the beginning of the show, strong installations establish themes of media critique and spatial intervention. A fantastic piece by Gretchen Bender, from 1990, features a bank of monitors—stencilled with gnomic provocations such as "body ownership"—that screen television broadcasts. Embedded in a wall-swallowing text painting by Martine Sims, from 2017, is her piece "Lessons I—CLXXX," from 2014-18, a computer-randomized montage of footage found on the Internet. Since neither Bender's nor Sims's video works has a real beginning or end, visitors have no choice but to drop in and wander off. But other pieces here are feats of concision, including Song Dong's "Broken Mirror," from 1999, which employs the simple yet metaphorically rich visual trick of shattering one reflected image in order to reveal a second, concealed scene. Perhaps the starkest contrast on view is between early, optimistic experiments in interconnectivity and an array of works that capture mass protests and state violence, or illuminate the use of video for surveillance and disinformation. In the final gallery, a video by New Red Order (a self-described "public secret society" with a rotating membership), from 2020, deploys digital effects to imagine the repatriation of Indigenous objects, making a visually epic and powerfully trenchant statement.—*J.F. (Museum of Modern Art; through July 8.)*

SUMMER PREVIEW

Garden Layers, Park Crochet, Picasso Problems

Just as flowers take root in graveyards, the lavish, colorful installations of the Jamaican artist **Ebony G. Patterson** reflect nature's beauty while revealing dark truths, particularly relating to colonialist legacies. A monumental glass peacock and a glittering flock of sculptural vultures are among the elements in her site-specific project, titled ". . . things come to thrive . . . in the shedding . . . in the molting . . . ," at the New York Botanical Garden. (Opens May 27.)

The latest iteration of MOMA's influential exhibition series **"New Photography"** unites seven photographers—Kelani Abass, Akinbode Akinbiyi, Yagazie Emezi, Amanda Iheme, Abraham Oghobase, Karl Ohiri, and Logo Oluwamuyiwa—who work in a range of international locations, but who all have ties to the energetic art scene in Lagos, Nigeria. (Opens May 28.)

The Frick Collection continues its inspired pairing of contemporary and historic artists—this time with a focus on the medium of pastel. A new mural by the sought-after, Swiss-born painter **Nicholas Party** is accompanied by the piece that inspired it: an early-eighteenth-century portrait of a man in a pilgrim costume, by **Rosalba Carriera,** a Venetian-born rococo virtuoso, one of the few acclaimed women painters of her day. (Opens June 1.)

The Brooklyn Museum is notoriously unshy when it comes to popular culture. Ask the winners of a short-lived reality show (think: "Top Chef" for artists) who had solo exhibitions there. Now comes **"It's Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby,"** inspired by the Australian comedian's scathing feminist takedown, on Netflix, of the Cubist painter. Works by Picasso—who once said that "women are machines for suffering"—are seen in the company of an impressive roster of female artists, including Cecily Brown, Marilyn Minter, and Mickalene Thomas. An audio tour by Gadsby accompanies the proceedings. (Opens June 2.)

"Sheila Pepe: My Neighbor's Garden" is the first outdoor installation by the gifted American textile artist. Working in cahoots with community volunteers, Pepe transforms Madison Square Park into an oasis of crocheted canopies that entwine with vining vegetation (long beans, bitter melon, morning glories) throughout the summer. (Opens June 26.)

Ages before the invention of mindfulness apps, Buddhism was born at the base of a tree, in northern India, where a prince sat down to meditate and—under the protection of a seven-headed snake—reached enlightenment. **"Tree and Serpent: Early Buddhist Art in India, 200 BCE-400 CE,"** at the Met, revisits the first six hundred years of artistic response to the tradition, through more than a hundred and twenty-five objects, including recent finds from ancient monastic sites. (Opens July 21.)

—*Andrea K. Scott*



MOVIES

American Gigolo

The tautly restrained energies of the writer and director Paul Schrader's 1980 melodrama are inseparable from the pulsating chimes and burbles of Giorgio Moroder's disco-tronic score and the sleek songs—such as Blondie's "Call Me"—that adorn the soundtrack. Richard Gere stars as Julian, a male sex worker serving women on the posh side of Los Angeles, who begins an affair with a politician's wife (Lauren Hutton). After Julian is hired to have rough sex with a rich woman (Patricia Carr), she turns up dead and he gets framed for her murder. Schrader films the action with

SUMMER PREVIEW

Technology, Adventure, Romance

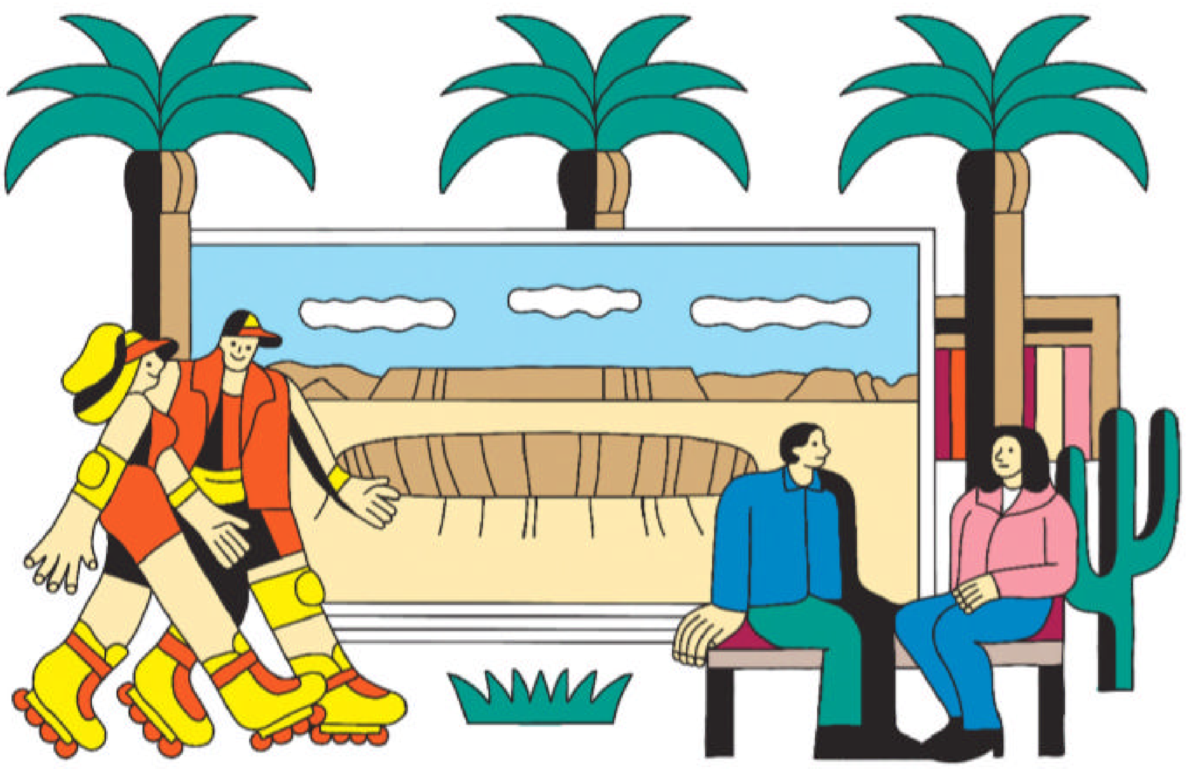
Science, whether as fact or fiction, plays a prominent role in this summer's releases, as in Wes Anderson's new comedy, **"Asteroid City"** (June 16). Like all his hyperdecorative spectacles, this one is also an action film; it's set in 1955, in a desert town, where a gathering of young amateur astronomers is interrupted by visitors from outer space. The cast includes Tom Hanks, Scarlett Johansson, and Jeffrey Wright. Cillian Murphy stars in **"Oppenheimer"** (July 21), Christopher Nolan's historical drama of the invention of the atomic bomb. Claire Simon's documentary **"Our Body"** (Aug. 4) is a report from a high-tech gynecological ward in a Paris hospital, where doctors and patients confront such matters as gender confirmation, abortion, infertility, and cancer.

Toys and children's books inspire a wide variety of live-action movies, starting with the remake of **"The Little Mermaid"** (May 26), directed by Rob Marshall (best known for "Chicago") and starring Halle Bailey as an aquatic princess who longs to be human. The animator Carlos Saldanha makes his live-action directorial début with **"Harold and the Purple Crayon"** (June 30), an adaptation of Crockett Johnson's book, from 1955, about a boy whose drawings come to life; the cast includes Zachary Levi, Zooey Deschanel, and Lil Rel Howery. Greta Gerwig's **"Barbie"** (July 21) stars Margot Robbie as the titular doll, who leaves the realm of toys and enters the human world; Ryan Gosling plays her male counterpart, Ken.

Love stories are always in season, starting with **"Past Lives"** (June 2), the first movie directed by the playwright Celine Song, about two friends from South Korea who reconnect after twelve years apart; Greta Lee, Teo Yoo, and John Magaro star. In **"Earth Mama"** (July 7), the début feature of the British director Savanah Leaf, a woman (Tia Nomore) in recovery from drug addiction fights for custody of her two children. Ira Sachs's furious romantic melodrama **"Passages"** (Aug. 4), set in Paris, stars Franz Rogowski as a German film director who leaves his longtime partner (Ben Whishaw) for a woman (Adèle Exarchopoulos).

Danger looms in sequels and original stories alike, such as **"Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny"** (June 30), directed by James Mangold and starring Harrison Ford for what he has called his final appearance as the title character. Sterling K. Brown and Mark Duplass play the last two people on Earth in Mel Eslyn's post-apocalyptic drama **"Biosphere"** (July 7). Tom Cruise is back for more intrepid stunts in **"Mission: Impossible—Dead Reckoning Part One"** (July 12), directed by Christopher McQuarrie.

—Richard Brody



a glossy, gliding precision, orchestrating the complications and controlling the tempo while sustaining the lurid mood with the glow of neon color and with high design—of architecture, furnishings, and clothing. (Gere's wardrobe, by Giorgio Armani, is a virtual co-star.) A consummate cinephile, Schrader builds several sequences, shot by shot, on themes by Jean-Luc Godard and Robert Bresson as he dramatizes Julian's crisis of conscience and, for that matter, the crisis of Hollywood itself—doing for money what should only be done for love.*—Richard Brody (Streaming on Prime Video, Paramount+, and other services.)*

Persepolis

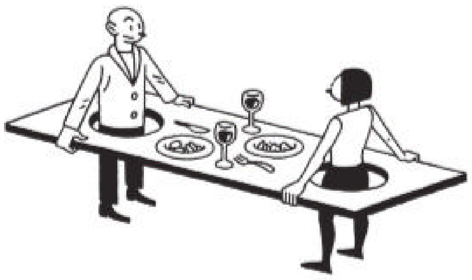
This striking animated production, from 2007, was made in France but is rooted in Iran. Its origins lie in two graphic novels by Marjane Satrapi, who co-directed the movie with Vincent Paronnaud. She is plainly the source of her heroine, also named Marjane, who is born in Tehran during the Shah's regime and grows up to witness the revolution of 1979; the mood, at first exultant, is soon darkened by a new sense of repression and threat. Marjane is an instinctive foe of the system, though her idea of rebellion is to listen to Iron Maiden in her bedroom, and a period spent as a student in Vienna ends in frustration and woe. Most of the film is in black-and-white, with sharply clipped and unshaded images; there is no denying their clarity and wit, yet the childish simplicity—like the general inexpressiveness of the faces—eventually wears thin, not least as Marjane leaves her childhood behind. In the French version, the voice of her grandmother is supplied by Danielle Darrieux; U.S. audiences hear that of Gena Rowlands. A fair trade.*—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 1/7/08.) (Streaming on Prime Video, Apple TV, and other services.)*

Posse

Mario Van Peebles's 1993 Western—rowdy yet earnest, playful yet scathing—peels away layers of militarism, colonialism, and crony capitalism to reveal a rotten core of white-supremacist violence. The action begins in 1898, during the Spanish-American War, in Cuba, where Black troops are forced to the front lines as cannon fodder. A handful of them (plus one white soldier, played by Stephen Baldwin) desert with a trove of stolen gold and make it to New Orleans, with a sadistic colonel (Billy Zane) on their trail. The Black veterans (Charles Lane, Tom Lister, Jr., and Tone Loc) and their leader, Jesse Lee (Van Peebles), fight their way West to Freemanville, an all-Black outpost founded by Jesse's father, who was killed by the Ku Klux Klan. Jesse seeks revenge for the murder while also leading a fierce battle to save the town from ruthless businessmen. Van Peebles tells the story with ferocious vigor and unsparing brutality, entering Jesse's haunted memory and detailing the farsighted schemes and improvisational daring on which the men's survival depends. Lane's idiosyncratic, puckish performance as the loquacious Weezie lends the bloody action antic humor.*—R.B. (Streaming on Freevee, Pluto, and other services.)*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town





TABLES FOR TWO

West African in Brooklyn

What exactly is Funso Akinya doing back there, in the kitchen at Akara House (642 Nostrand Ave.; $5-$16), his tiny takeout counter in Crown Heights? The first time I tried his food, I looked up from my cardboard container in stunned silence. None of the short, straightforward menu descriptions, hand-painted on the wall—"bean based burger," "yam porridge (& beans)"—came close to conveying the culinary wizardry at play, though a passerby nailed it: "They got the good food in there!" he shouted through the open door.

And how! But, seriously, how? For his interpretation of *akara*, a veggie fritter of Yoruban origin, Akinya, who was born and reared in Nigeria, whips beans—a variety known in Nigeria as *ewa oloyin*, or honey bean—with salt, ginger, garlic, onion, and jalapeño, plus a few secret ingredients. Then he slips scoops of the mixture into a deep fryer, where they bubble and sizzle into gorgeous golden patties with crackly edges, lacy as spun sugar. The *akara* are light, almost fluffy—"creamy," Akinya says—but substantial, too, pleasingly chewy and hefty enough for a sandwich that was inspired by Akinya's observation, during a stint fulfilling online grocery orders, that New Yorkers love veggie burgers. He designed the sandwich to find common ground with McDonald's, the first place that he worked in the U.S., and with Popeyes, layering each *akara* with mayonnaise, cucumber, American cheese, and his unctuous "Nigerian red sauce" (tomato, habanero, garlic, ginger, onion, bay leaf), in a roll akin to *agege*, a soft, sweet yeasted Nigerian bread.

Instead of French fries, there are fried sweet plantains, with Nigerian red sauce for dipping. Plantains also figure in the yam porridge, adding sweetness to a stick-to-your-ribs mash of honey beans with tender chunks of puna yam—a mild-flavored tuber also known as Ghanaian or Nigerian yam—plus more garlic, ginger, and jalapeño. Part of Akinya's gift is his ability to rely on a tight larder of ingredients, rearranging the same few building blocks to make simple starches sing. Another porridge, called *ogi*, which has the texture of whipped potatoes, is made from fermented corn. (The tang is strong, and only slightly offset by honey.) For an extremely satisfying dish called *moi moi*, Akinya steams, in a banana leaf, the same mixture he fries for his *akara*. The *moi moi*—soft, crumbly, tamale-adjacent—is served alone or over jollof rice, with a handful of kale salad.

The single misstep I encountered at Akara House was the chicken *suya*, featuring cubes of white meat that were unfortunately overcooked, though wonderfully seasoned. *Suya* refers to a peanut-and-chili-based spice mix used on meat skewers, which is popular throughout West Africa and, increasingly, in New York—Brooklyn Suya (717 Franklin Ave.; $9-$20), another excellent Crown Heights takeout counter, opened in 2019. Both the chicken and the steak there were quite juicy one recent afternoon; the salmon, glazed in a peanut-based sauce, better still. Each protein (there is also tofu or shrimp) is served in a bowl, over rice or kale, with a choice of sides that include avocado, hard-boiled egg, and sweet plantain. The finished plate is dusted in one of four *suya* mixes—ranging from atomic (super spicy, but complex) to mild.

At Akara House, Akinya serves a striking, pithy lemonade, made by boiling whole lemons, limes, and oranges and letting them steep for hours. Half a mile north, at Ginjan Café (333 Nostrand Ave.; $10-$20), a new Bed-Stuy outpost of a Harlem spot opened by two Guinean brothers, you can further explore West African beverages, plus an astonishing array of homey, delicious food, made off-site and warmed up to order, including a lamb jollof rice, topped with lollipop chops and a green-olive sauce. Drinks include *ginjan*, a traditional cold-pressed ginger juice, punched up with pineapple, lemon, vanilla, and anise, and a cold-brewed *bissap*—hibiscus tea, heady with nutmeg, cinnamon, cardamom, and cloves, and brightened by fresh mint.

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAY WILLIAMS FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

Behind every delivery is a well-orchestrated effort.

We're reinventing our network so you can deliver more value, convenience, and confidence to your customers.



Scan the code to see how USPS can move your business forward.
Or visit **usps.com/totaleffort**

©2023 United States Postal Service®. All Rights Reserved.
The Eagle Logo is among the many trademarks of the U.S. Postal Service®.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®

DELIVERING FOR AMERICA



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
JUSTICES AND MONEY

Law and ethics are two different things. In 1991, the year Clarence Thomas was confirmed to the Supreme Court, the Justices agreed to follow the ethics rules that the Judicial Conference—the policymaking agency in the judicial branch—had laid out, beginning in 1973. Their decision to abide by this Code of Conduct was voluntary, because it expressly binds federal judges who are not members of the Supreme Court. But they undertook to annually disclose, for example, nongovernmental income, investments, and gifts, although no real consequences could be imposed for their disobedience—aside from public shaming. That's what Justice Thomas has faced following revelations of items he has not disclosed over the years, including luxury vacations, real-estate transactions, and private-school tuition for a grandnephew of whom he had custody, all funded by his friend Harlan Crow, a billionaire donor to the Republican Party.

The argument that Justices aren't bound by the Code of Conduct derives from the idea that the lower federal courts were created by Congress, while the Supreme Court was mandated by the Constitution. In 2011, when ethical questions were already swirling around Thomas's friendship with Crow—and the Justice's failure to disclose income that his wife, Virginia, had been paid by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, and by Hillsdale College, a Christian institution—Chief Justice John Roberts pointedly claimed that when Congress set up the Judicial Conference, a century ago, it was for "the courts it had created," and so it "does not supervise the Supreme Court."

Congress, however, has enacted ethics laws for federal officials, including the Justices. Among other things, they require the financial disclosure of gifts; prohibit the receipt of "anything of value" from someone who has business before the Court; and call for Justices to recuse themselves when their "impartiality might reasonably be questioned." Roberts acknowledged the laws in his statement, but said that "the Court has never addressed whether Congress may impose those requirements on the Supreme Court." (He claimed that "the Justices nevertheless comply," though compliance has been far from perfect.) If the Justices were to address the question, it seems possible that they'd find that applying those laws to Justices violates the separation of powers. The upshot of all this reveals the true scandal: Supreme Court Justices, alone in our system, are not truly regulated by anyone other than themselves.



Roberts has held to his line since the Thomas revelations. Last month, he declined, in writing, an invitation to testify at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on "Supreme Court Ethics Reform," citing "the importance of preserving judicial independence." He attached a statement, signed by all nine Justices, reciting the ethical principles that they "voluntarily" follow—a rare show of unanimity on this Court.

Federal judgeships on the Supreme Court and on the lower courts that Congress created under Article III of the Constitution include life tenure, and lawyers choose that career path knowing that their earnings, though significantly higher than most Americans', will be limited compared with those offered by more lucrative avenues open to them. In 2007, Roberts said that Congress's failure to sufficiently raise judicial salaries was "a constitutional crisis that threatens to undermine the strength and independence of the federal judiciary." This year, the Justices' salaries are less than three hundred thousand dollars, and judges generally cannot be compensated for side activities other than teaching or writing books. But many who pursue a judicial career may have inherited wealth, or amassed it, or married into it, and so lead lives not drastically less comfortable than their peers in private practice.

Thomas was born into poverty, and has spent nearly all his career in government jobs. In 2001, the earliest year for which records are available, a majority

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

of the Justices reported assets in the millions to the tens of millions of dollars; he reported assets of hundreds of thousands. According to Bloomberg, more recent financial disclosures have indicated that at least six Justices are multimillionaires, with Roberts the wealthiest. Thomas appears to remain one of the least wealthy, though new reporting has revealed that he failed to disclose even more of his wife's earnings, including, in 2012, payments for "consulting" arranged by their friend Leonard Leo—an influential leader of campaigns to install conservative judges—from an organization that filed a Supreme Court amicus brief in a landmark voting-rights case later that year.

Other Justices, of course, have enjoyed perks, which they have reported. In 2018, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, then one of the wealthiest Justices, disclosed that the billionaire Morris Kahn had funded a stay in Jordan and in Israel, where she'd gone to receive a lifetime-achievement award. Between 2004 and 2020, Stephen Breyer, another wealthy Justice, disclosed that he took several trips that were paid for by the Pritzker family (for some of these, he was serving as a juror for the Pritzker Architecture Prize), which has contributed more than twenty million dollars to Democratic groups.

The patronage cast of the benefits that Crow provided Thomas stands out. The rules allow expensive gifts, if disclosed. Still, disclosure itself doesn't alleviate the public unease at a Justice's receiving such benefits. This is so even if they appear unlikely to influence how a Justice votes. Indeed, it might have been more troubling to see expensive gifts given to Anthony Kennedy, whose vote was often in play in high-profile and politically charged cases. For Thomas, whose positions have been consistently the most conservative on the Court for three decades, the gifts, and the payments to his wife, could be seen as something akin to gratuities for how he would have performed the job anyway.

The only Supreme Court Justice ever to resign in an ethics scandal was Abe Fortas, in 1969. He had accepted today's equivalent of a hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars as a retainer fee from a financier friend who was eventually convicted of selling unregistered stock; Fortas returned the fee and denied any wrongdoing. Our standards for public officials have declined, as demonstrated by Donald Trump's continuing popularity. But the current moment is an opportunity to move beyond being scandalized by one Justice. If rules for Justices are understood as not binding, it compromises the idea that no officials are above the law. The Court should not be the sole lawmaker, judge, and enforcer regarding its members' conduct, in ethics or in any other matter.

—Jeannie Suk Gersen

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL

TOO LATE FOR THE TREES



Last week, while Joe Biden and Kevin McCarthy met to discuss the debt ceiling, Carole King walked through the rain to the Capitol to make her case for the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, a bill that would designate millions of acres in the West as wilderness and put an end to logging in these areas. "You can get members of Congress when they're walking out," she said of the south entrance to the Capitol. "When I came here with Representative Carolyn Maloney"—the main sponsor of the bill—"she brought Mark Meadows over to me, and he said, 'I'll take a look at your bill.' I knew he wouldn't." King, who carried a LeSportsac backpack and an umbrella from MOMA, has periodically ventured to the Capitol over the past few decades to lobby for her conservationist bill. "In the nineties, I came here with these mountain guys from Montana who just put suit jackets on with their jeans," she said. "My last husband lived in a tepee."

King has lived in Idaho since 1977. "The first time I drove from L.A. into Idaho, I knew I was home, which is an odd thing for a Jewish girl from New York to think," she said, walking up the Capitol steps. "My first cabin was wilderness-adjacent, which meant no running water except for a hot-spring pool. It was only accessible by snowmobile or skis in winter. I kidnapped my daughter—she was mine to kidnap—and said, 'You're coming to live with me till you're eighteen.' When she turned eighteen, my then husband, the fourth one, the last one, said he would snowmobile my daughter's stuff out, and then she and I cross-country skied twenty-six miles to meet him."

King's first meeting was with Josephine Amusa, the policy adviser for the Senate Minority Leader, Hakeem Jeffries. King took out a pamphlet. "The grizzly bear is an umbrella species, and they're not doing well," King said. "How many more minutes do I have?"

"Twelve," Amusa responded.

King continued, "The Forest Service is not what people think it is. It's arm in arm with the timber industry. The forest is under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, because they consider trees a crop!"

"My boss has to remain as neutral as possible," Amusa said. "But I'll take a look." She asked for a photo with King, for her mother. "I'll take off my mask for the photo but won't inhale," King said.

With a bit of downtime, King and her entourage traipsed around the Capitol. "I feel reverent," she said. She reached out and touched a statue of Rosa Parks. Colleen Corrigan, an environmental advocate who was accompanying King, briefed her on their next meeting, with Gen Z's first member of Congress, Maxwell Frost, a Florida Democrat: "He's twenty-six, he was a rideshare driver, he's big on gun con-



Carole King and Jamie Raskin

trol." They took the stairs to the second floor. King removed a pair of heels from her bag. Frost came out to welcome King. A framed Boygenius record hung on the wall.

King took out her brochure to indicate where wildlife corridors would be protected under her bill. "If the animals can't get between the ecosystems, they become inbred," she said.

"What's been getting in the way?" Frost asked. "Do you need Republican support?" They talked strategy. "Maybe get a New York Republican member on board to prove themselves to that more progressive part of their constituency?" he said. Then he suggested, "Maybe just find the five biggest Carole King fans who are Republican."

Frost brought out a copy of "Tapestry" for King to sign. "My first Broadway show was 'Beautiful,'" he said.

"The story is mostly true," King said.

"Mostly?"

"The long-haired guy at the end was a composite of one of my husbands and James Taylor," she said. "I finally went to see it in disguise."

They took a photo together. "Can you AirDrop it to me?" he asked.

The group took an underground tunnel to the office of Jamie Raskin, a Democrat from Maryland. He was waiting in his bandanna. "I'm thrilled you're here petitioning the government for redress of grievance, and without hitting police officers over the head with a Confederate battle flag," Raskin said to King.

She showed him photos of national forest that had been clear-cut. "A forest knows how to restore itself," she said. "It's evolution."

Raskin frowned. "This is bad. So this is about the timber industry's capture of the forest service."

"Yes. That's exactly it," she said.

"I hate to use this phrasing," Raskin responded. "But it's too late."

Her final stop was with the sole Republican congressman she was visiting, Ralph Norman, of South Carolina. He was in a meeting for the House Rules Committee, but he came out to take a photo with King. He didn't sign on to the bill. "But my wife and I saw your musical, and we just loved it," he told her.

—*Antonia Hitchens*

SENDOFF DEPT.
TOASTING NORMAN



Norman Bukofzer, who tended bar at the Jockey Club and the Ritz-Carlton for forty years, did not talk about his regulars. A big mouth, like a runny nose, doesn't befit a good barman. Still, word got around: Bette Davis was a patron, as was Jodie Foster, Ralph Fiennes, the Crown Prince of Bahrain, the King of Jordan. Bono was a friend. Joe Torre gave Bukofzer dugout seats. David Mamet reportedly liked to sit on a stool and take notes on Bukofzer's banter. Garry Marshall cast him in a movie. On multiple occasions, the wife of a regular called the bar from her husband's deathbed so the patient could have one last chat. Bukofzer's bar was a place to run into interesting people. At the Jockey Club, he once m.c.'d the wedding of two regulars—Jerry Tallmer, of the *Village Voice*, and the dancer Frances Martin. "Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Ford were having a pre-theater bite in the next room," Tallmer later recalled. "Fran ran over to invite them to our wedding, and nearly got shot by a Secret Service man."

Liam Neeson went a lot in the nineties. "I had a wee place down on Wooster Street, in SoHo," Neeson said recently. "One afternoon, I went in as usual, sat at my seat, and there was this other gentleman, maybe two seats up, white hair, white beard." Bukofzer suggested they'd get along. They talked for a couple of hours, then the man left. "Norman said to me, 'Liam, I didn't know you're a Deadhead.' I said, 'What?' 'A Deadhead!' I said, 'What are you talking about, Norman.' The gentleman I'd been talking to was—I've forgotten his name, you have to forgive me. Jerry! It was Jerry Garcia."

Neeson and Bukofzer became out-of-bar friends—a wedding, a christening, a shiva. Bukofzer met Neeson's mother. "He was a delight. Just a great, great fecking guy," Neeson said. The two hadn't spoken in a while when, earlier this year, Neeson learned that Bukofzer had died, at age seventy-eight. Neeson was shocked, and a little abashed. "I was kicking myself for those fecking times I was across the road thinking, I must see Norman sometime, and I never did," he said.

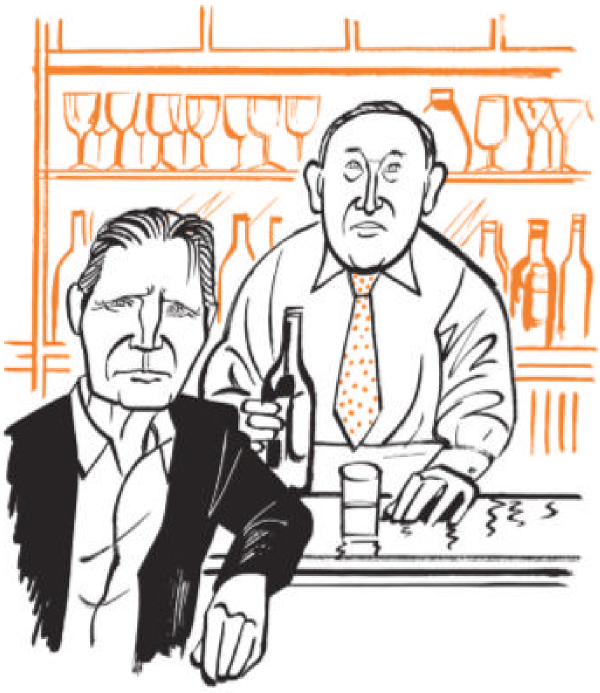
Thus was hatched a memorial of sorts, organized by Neeson and another frequent patron, the TV travel journalist Peter Greenberg. Once more to the Ritz. Drinkers and former co-workers flew in from Texas, Hawaii, Europe. They stood in the bar sipping chaste quantities of liquor. A gang of old Ritz colleagues were gathered in a corner, talking shop.

"His beverage costs were consistently off by less than .1 per cent over five years. You don't find that anymore."

"You think of Dale DeGroff, in his moments, at the Rainbow Room."

"The Rainbow Room, it wasn't a regulars' place."

The assembled gathered around a long table. Greenberg welcomed every-



Liam Neeson and Norman Bukofzer

one, and then issued bad news: Neeson was laid low in his room, upstairs, by an illness. "I got hit with something, I don't know what the feck it was," he reported, by phone. "I have to assume COVID. I took all the Vitamin D in the world." He went on, "I couldn't even make his fecking memorial."

Stories were solicited. "In 1992, we did an Election Night, and we gave everyone exit polls, Clinton or Bush," a woman named Anita Cotter said. "Norman won by a landslide. It was a write-in."

A man recalled Bette Davis shuffling out of the bar one evening, past

two grandparents with grandkids: "The grandmother said, 'You may not know this, but in her day she was white-hot.' Norman was wiping up the bar and says, 'So was I.'"

A novelist named Edward Cozza recalled some of Bukofzer's bartending rules. Champagne corks were twisted, not popped. ("Just let it hiss, like when you're with a girl and have to pass gas.") Measuring cups were for amateurs. Martinis were stirred. "I asked him one time, sitting at the bar, 'No shake?'" Cozza said. "He said, 'It's not a malted.'"

Milling among the regulars was a non-regular: Mindy Lesser, Bukofzer's wife. She wore glasses and had short blond hair. "The Norman that you all are talking about is not the Norman I know," she said. "All the drinks he wasn't spilling in here, he was spilling at home!"

Greenberg said, "He always talked about his wife—we never met her!" He went on, "Today is Meet Mindy Day!"

Mindy reported that the bartender's code of silence could extend even to her. "He would tell me *some* stories," she said. "Not a lot. We got beautiful wedding gifts—it was like that. The Grateful Dead sent a sterling-silver bowl and a painting. U2 was a vase, Tiffany or Cartier, one of those."

She held up a cranberry mocktail; she said she'd given up booze. Bukofzer never made cocktails at home anyway. "Norman didn't drink," she said.

—*Zach Helfand*

THE MUSICAL LIFE
COMIC TIMING



"*And on keys* . . ." The spotlight pivots, a humble nod, a wave. Rarely do you hear "*On bassoon* . . ." Not to mention the accordion. But Henry Koperski, an L.A.-based musician and composer who plays all three of those instruments (plus saxophone, "and also clarinet and flute, but just for fun"), has made a name for himself accompanying, mostly on piano, musically inclined comedians such as Matteo Lane, Catherine Cohen, Matt Rogers, Larry Owens, and Alan Cumming in their cabaret endeavors and streaming specials. So now you've been introduced to Henry Koperski—but what about his alter ego, Henki Skidu?

Recently, before a solo Skidu show in Williamsburg of original songs, covers (Bernstein, "Brandy"), and something in between ("I'm a Beethoven freak, so I took his chord structures and wrote my own lyrics"), Koperski—thirty-four, sandy-blond hair and scruff, in a T-shirt that read "Normalize Spiritual Ecstasy"—sipped a passion-fruit margarita in a vegan restaurant and explained his alias. It's a mashup of "Henry" with the Sumerian trickster god Enki and Gilgamesh's lover Enkidu, synthesized during an acid trip on Halloween, while dressed as the Hermit tarot card (big coat and hat, with a Bluetooth speaker on a carabiner as a lantern: "No one knew what I was").

Koperski pulled something from his backpack—a gray rock with a hole in it that he'd found on a Santa Monica beach and had strung twine through. He wears it when he performs as Skidu. "I feel magical when I wear it. I feel really grounded. The first time I wore it in public, I went to this gay bar in L.A. called Precinct. And I felt like I was best friends with everyone there. People just started talking to me."

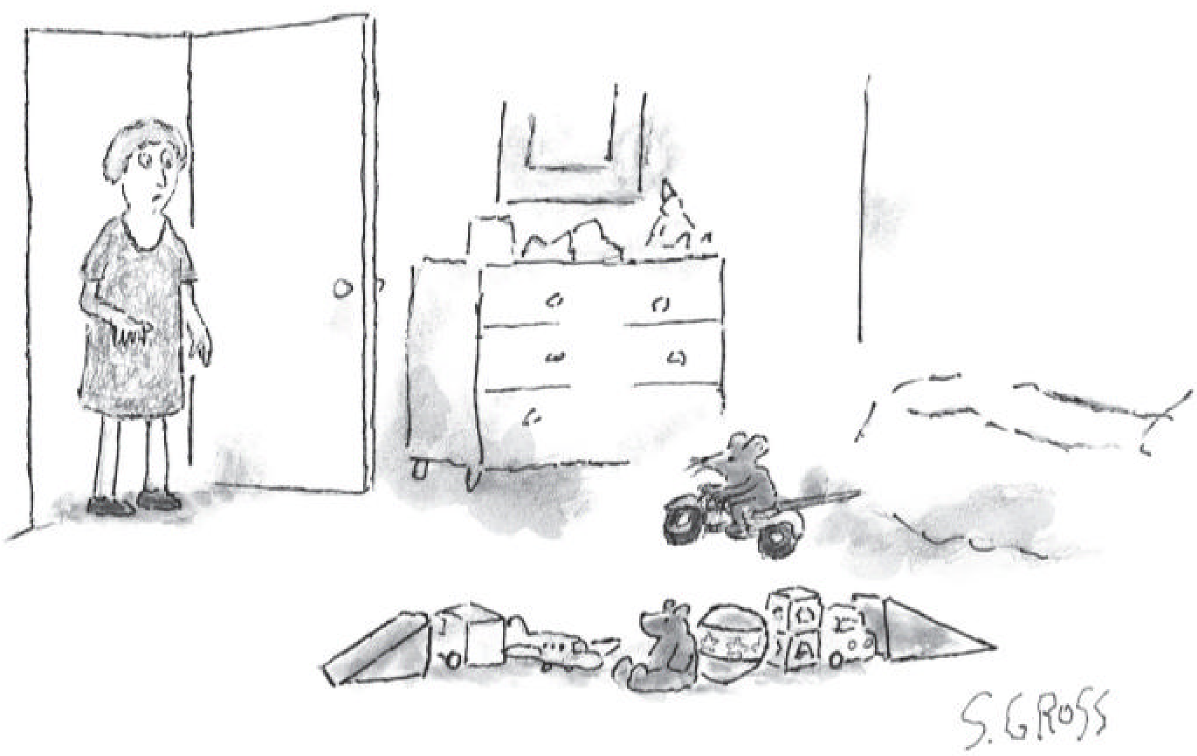
About the big rock around his neck? "Yeah, one person said, 'Oh, is that a seeing stone?' And I was, like, 'What's a seeing stone?' Then I started looking through it, and I decided that I can see people's true, one-word essence." (In his interlocutor's case: "Open.")

After studying jazz saxophone and classical bassoon at Western Michigan University, Koperski moved to New York and took improv classes at the Upright Citizens Brigade. "We would do these shows where you'd take a movie and a musical and mash them together. The first one we did was 'Star Wars: Episode I' with 'Annie.'" The comedian Jo Firestone played Yoda and sang "You Are Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile."

When he works with comedians, Koperski said, "there's this humor vibration that I feel like I can tap into. Like with Cat Cohen, she'd be singing a song about, like, her asshole, but it's not about that." The collaboration, he said, "is about the musical connection that you can have with someone. It's like we're both playing the same drum set or something.

"Sometimes I think I got into comedy because I was scared to be a musician," he mused, chewing a cauliflower "wing." "Anything you do, you can be, like, 'Well, I was just joking.' Now I'm really trying to only be sincere and authentic, which is equally scary."

During the pandemic, he started reading up on Gnosticism. "So, in the beginning, there were the Aeons," he said. "Sophia, which means 'wisdom' in Greek, was one of them, and she wanted to see herself, or observe



herself. So she plunged out of the Pleroma, into the abyss. It was swirling chaos." For that night's showcase (title: "A Thesis of Who I Think I Am Right Now"), Koperski planned to sing a composition about Sophia ("Open your hidden eye to view the colors of your heart").

He described being in a greenroom before a comedy show in L.A. last year. "Everyone was being wacky and a hundred and ten per cent and talking over each other and being so desperately *something*. And I recorded it. I actually put it on a song on my album. You can barely hear it, but I put it in there because it's the essence of chaos. Chaos is five comedians in a greenroom."

He strolled over to the venue for his show, Scholes Street Studio. The room was filling up, and two women chatted about microdosing. "The cool thing is that it's working behind the scenes," one said. "Henry would be a *great* guide."

Koperski introduced a song that "came from an improvisation from when I ordered an Uber to the airport and it was, like, twelve minutes away." Skidu began to sing, eyes closed. "It's time to gooooo. A place where I can hear my soul," he crooned. "My Self and nobody else."

—*Emma Allen*

L.A. POSTCARD
TALKING POINTS



Small talk: anchor of polite society, or rot in need of rooting out? "At dinner parties, oftentimes, the conversation is really surface," Ashley Merrill, a founder of a card game called the Deep, said the other day. She sat at a dining table in her glass-walled house in Santa Monica, wearing silk pajamas the color of sand. " 'Where did you go on vacation?' Or it's about current events, which are really depressing."

In 2019, seeking a solution, Merrill teamed up with a friend, Kate MacArthur. They came up with prompts. Then cards. Sample questions: "Can love really cure all?" "If you could eliminate social media forever, would you?" "How do you know when you're a grownup?" (Perhaps when you require scripted prompts to interact with others?) They've sold more than ten thousand packs of three hundred cards. "These exercises bring out something wild," Merrill said. "You set aside the persona you show up with—the perfect Instagram version of yourself. You give up your fear of being cancelled and connect with people on another level."

Merrill and MacArthur host dinners to see how their hypotheticals play out; Goldie Hawn showed up to one. On a recent Saturday, they hosted sixteen women, mostly strangers. All had been outfitted in pajamas made by Lunya, another company founded by Merrill.

Uniformed servers set down wooden planks of nigiri as MacArthur, in a gauzy white robe and matching pants, kicked off a "rapid-fire round," directing a question at each guest.

"Chances that we're living in a computer simulation," she said. "Above ten per cent, or below?"

"Above," Leland Drummond, a founder of a direct-to-consumer underwear brand, said.

"The five major religions of the world are Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism," MacArthur said. "In a thousand years, will all five of these still exist?"

"I'm the worst person to get this," Erica Domesek, who owns a how-to Web site, said. "I joke that I'm only Jewish in the kitchen."

Merrill moved on to more prompts.

"Would you rather make one million dollars at fifteen years old or fifteen million at fifty years old?" Merrill said. "Raise your hand for a million at fifteen." Five hands went up.

"Because you could make the millions into much more," a jewelry designer said.

"How do you think it would change you, to be fifteen and have a million dollars?" MacArthur asked.

The jewelry designer said, "The risk is that you're an asshole."

"Like, it's a high probability," Merrill said.

"Honestly, if it was in L.A., I would say it's gonna make you an asshole," the designer said. "The kids here are kind of fucked up."

Rachel Shillander, an architect, read the next question: "Is using makeup, hair dye, Botox, etc. a way of lying about our real appearance to the world?"

"Oh, *damn*," someone said. Eight hands went up.

"I'm pro-choice for Botox and all the other things," one respondent said. (She asked to remain anonymous, because her husband didn't know that she'd got Botox.) "I don't know that it's lying. I think the dangerous part is going too far." Casualties were mentioned: an aunt lost the ability to whistle (too much Botox), a relative was rumored to have died under the knife. (The anesthesiologist may have been on Snapchat.) The women discussed how much to reveal, and to whom.

"I go to places where I'm in just a sports bra and pants," a blond woman said. "Other moms will ask, 'How are your boobs so perky?' I'm, like, 'Because they're fucking fake!' "

Next question: "If you didn't have to conform to society's or anyone else's expectations, what would your ideal living arrangement be with your significant other?" There was near-consensus: separate bathrooms, separate bedrooms, and, *maybe*, a shared bedroom.

"Not gonna lie—when I had COVID and two weeks in the guest room, I was loving it," a woman in indigo silk said. "I kept testing positive, and I was, like, *yes*."

"I think Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera had the ideal situation," Sam Klemick, an artist, said. "She had a house, he had a house, and there was a bridge."

"Imagine this," Merrill said, as platters of mochi circulated. She read off a card: "You're really poor, and, despite working two jobs, you're still struggling to pay for food and shelter for your family. You discover a way to steal a few dollars from tens of thousands of super-rich people. You'd steal no more than ten dollars from each wealthy family. Should you do this to help your own family?"

Four hands went up. "Wow," MacArthur said. "That's the least number of yeses we've ever gotten."

—*Sheila Yasmin Marikar*

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

THE REVOLVING DOOR

What a subway killing reveals about mental illness and homelessness.

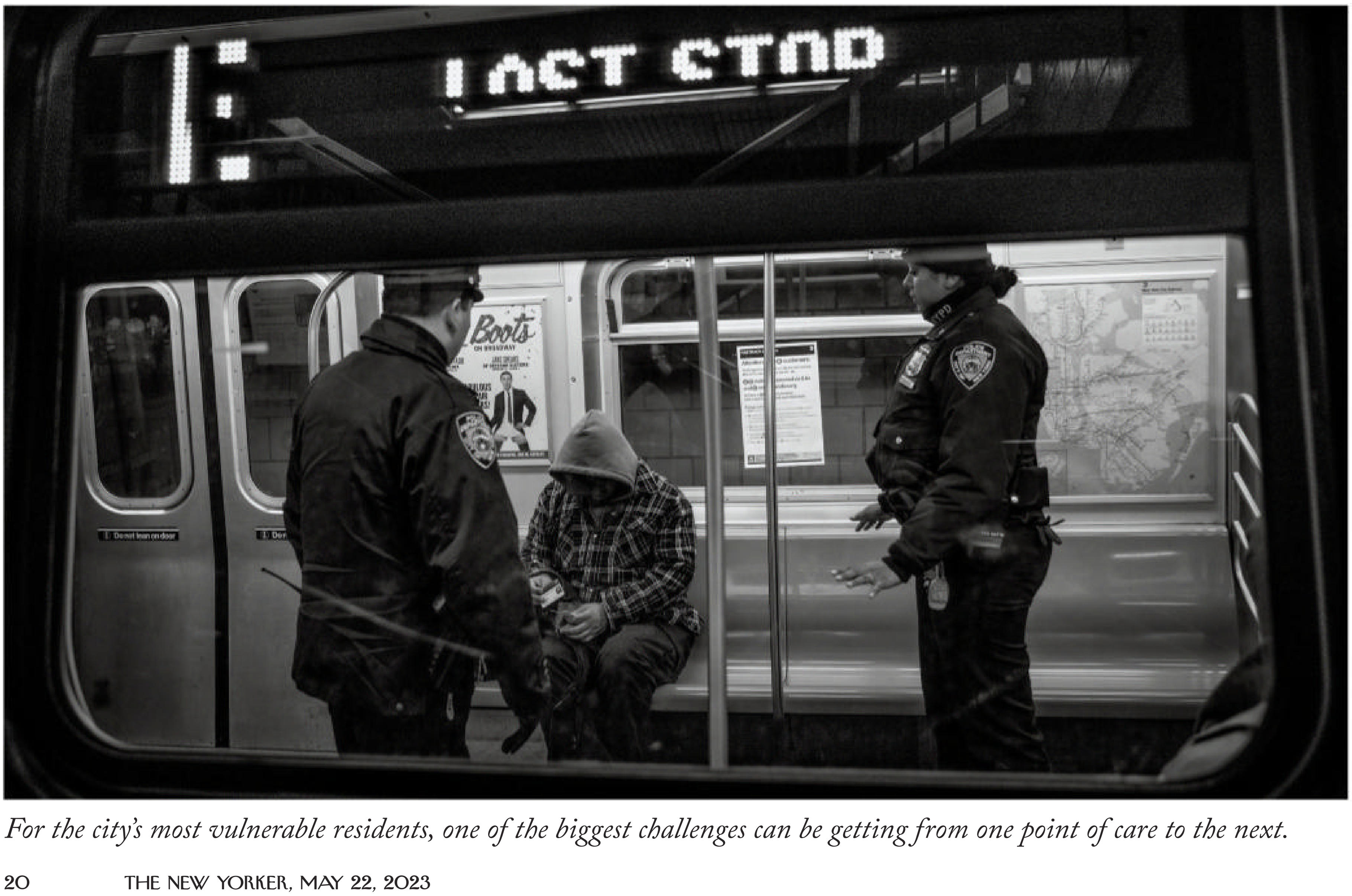
BY ADAM ISCOE

Not long ago, on Sixth Avenue in Chelsea, I walked past a man in a black coat, who was hunched over, licking the sidewalk. He murmured to himself and passersby. For a moment, it occurred to me that he might be having a psychotic episode. Then I ducked into a deli, bought lunch, and headed to the office. Should I have called 911? Maybe. The thought didn't linger long.

This kind of thing happens all the time. Recently, aboard an F train, en route to Brooklyn, I saw a young man reach both hands into his pants and start masturbating. He wore a dirty sweater that was pulled over his head, and his socks were halfway off his feet. There was a cup of coffee and a chicken bone under his seat. An older man with two FreshDirect bags loaded with clothes and takeout containers was stretched out nearby. The young man was crying, and the older man slept. Several straphangers were watching, but it was late at night, and no one seemed particularly interested or concerned. Later, I asked an inpatient psychiatrist at a local hospital about the incident. There was little I could've done, he said, adding that the young man likely would have wound up at a hospital sooner or later. Perhaps he had recently been discharged from one. More often than not, people experiencing acute mental distress in public places get picked up by the police or an ambulance and are taken to the emergency room. Sometimes they find their way to a hospital on their own. Other times, something awful happens first.

On Monday, May 1st, aboard an F train in Manhattan, a Black man named Jordan Neely started yelling. He shouted, "I want food!" He shouted, "I'm not taking no for an answer!" He shouted, "I'm ready to die!" And then Daniel Penny, a twenty-four-year-old Marine veteran, who is white, pinned Neely down and started to strangle him. A second man held Neely's wrists. Another passenger filmed the incident on a cell phone. Others were calling 911. Penny had Neely in a choke hold—and Neely's body went limp. Someone said, "He'll be all right." Three minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes. The train had pulled into the Broadway-Lafayette subway station. The doors had opened, and a few passengers drifted onto the platform, upstairs, into the spring afternoon. Belowground, a police officer wearing blue gloves began chest compressions. Neely was pronounced dead. The city's medical examiner ruled the death a homicide.

The N.Y.P.D. questioned Penny, then released him. (His lawyers say that he was acting in self-defense.) "We don't know exactly what happened here," Mayor Eric Adams said, afterward. "We cannot just blanketly say what a passenger should or should



For the city's most vulnerable residents, one of the biggest challenges can be getting from one point of care to the next.

BENJAMIN NORMAN

not do in a situation like that." Kathy Hochul, the governor of New York, said, "There's consequences for behavior." Was she talking about Neely, or the man who killed him?

Many locals knew Jordan Neely. He liked to hang out in Times Square, where he would perform, dressed up like Michael Jackson—the side slide, the crotch grab, and the moonwalk were his signature moves. Law-enforcement and public-health officials also knew him. He had been arrested more than forty times, mostly for petty offenses, such as loitering and trespassing. He had a history of mental illness, and that Monday afternoon he had reportedly been throwing garbage at other passengers. Reflecting on the incident, the inpatient psychiatrist, who has worked in hospitals in New York for more than fifteen years, told me, "A couple months ago, a mentally ill man threw a juice box at my kid in the subway at Union Square, where there was a police presence, and no one intervened. The man walked out of the station." Neely was killed. "It's just very strange, the arbitrariness of it," he said.

The psychiatrist went on to tell me that Neely had been involuntarily hospitalized, at Bellevue, in 2021. Neely was admitted to the hospital's forensic-psychiatry unit, on the nineteenth floor, where doctors and nurses treat patients who have been recently arrested, or incarcerated on Rikers Island. Then, like so many other patients, Neely walked out of the hospital and onto the street. For a while, he lived at a homeless shelter. Sometimes he stayed with his aunt Carolyn and her wife, Whitney, at their apartment in Washington Heights, near where he grew up. In January, the two moved upstate, and Neely decided not to go—he said that he didn't want to burden them. In early April, outreach workers spotted him on the subway. He urinated in front of them and they called the police. Carolyn told the *Post* that she had tried for years to get judges and doctors to help. "The whole system just failed him," she said. "He fell through the cracks."

There are more than two hundred thousand residents of New York City living with severe mental illness; roughly five per cent of them are homeless. That's thirteen thousand people with schizophrenia, major depressive and bipolar disorders, or other significant mental- or behavioral-health diagnoses, all of whom regularly spend the night at a shelter, in the subway, on the street. They're the ones you recognize—the people whom, for the past fifty years, every mayor has either tried to help, harass, or hide from view. Rudy Giuliani's cops were known to chase people out of midtown, forcing them into the Bronx and Queens. Michael Bloomberg largely avoided public initiatives that addressed mental illness. Bill de Blasio allocated almost a billion dollars for a mental-health plan, but it was criticized for failing to track outcomes or prioritize treatment for those who needed help the most.

Last November, Adams, citing a "crisis we see all around us," announced at a press conference that homeless people with mental illness would be removed from the streets and the subways, against their will if necessary, by the police and other city employees. Advocates were outraged. Norman Siegel, the former head of the New York Civil Liberties Union and a longtime friend of the Mayor, said, "Just because someone smells, because they haven't had a shower for weeks, because they're mumbling, because their clothes are disheveled, that doesn't mean they're a danger to themselves or others." Rumors spread quickly. Were the police about to start rounding up people who simply appeared to be mentally ill? How many were going to be detained? Two weeks later, lawyers sought to halt the initiative. In a courtroom downtown, an attorney for the city, who was defending the Mayor's plan, said, "As far as anyone in this room knows, the initiative hasn't changed anything." The judge asked, "So the purpose of the press conference was to do what?"

"To announce the fact that the Mayor is taking the initiative of providing further guidance to the agencies about what is permitted under current law so that they can take action to protect New Yorkers under circumstances that the law permits."

Adams's policy, in other words, was more of the same.

In 1987, Mayor Ed Koch announced a broad interpretation of New York state law that permitted him to hospitalize the "loonies" and "crazies" around town. In the decades since, police and E.M.S. workers have regularly transported homeless people with apparent mental illness to hospitals against their will. That's just part of the job: violent crime, parking tickets, heart attacks, the unsheltered woman in a wheelchair at Penn Station who is taken to Bellevue every few months after creating a public disturbance. The man with four large black suitcases who is picked up for zigzagging through traffic in Brooklyn and sent to the psychiatric emergency room at Kings County Hospital. The woman with schizophrenia who believes that the French government bought a church on Fifth Avenue and granted her the legal right to live there. One E.M.T., who has worked on ambulance crews across the city for the past twenty years, told me, "If the person is out of their mind, if you can see the person is not all there, the police will call for us, and we'll come and take them." (In the course of reporting this article, I interviewed dozens of E.M.T.s, paramedics, police officers, nurses, social workers, emergency-room doctors, and inpatient psychiatrists, most of whom requested anonymity in order to speak openly about the people in their care.)

Here's how it happens. An E.M.T. and her partner park the ambulance—cops call it "the bus"—and evaluate the scene for safety. *Does the individual have a weapon*? *Where's the nearest egress*? Then she'll put on a pair of purple nitrile gloves and make a cautious approach. She'll say, "What's going on today, sir?," or "Ma'am, how are you feeling tonight?" The person might respond with a mumble, a shout, or the formality you'd expect in a job interview. Often, the person will say, "I don't want to tell you my name," so the E.M.T. will smile and offer her own. She'll say, "You're not in trouble. I just want to know why you're

standing in the middle of the road. Can you come with me to the sidewalk, please? I'm here to listen." Or maybe the person is already ripping the hair from his head and trying to escape the encounter by tossing the E.M.T.'s stretcher into the street. In that case, a paramedic can use a cotton sling to tie the patient's wrists to his ankles and inject a drug, such as the sedative midazolam or the anesthetic ketamine. But not every ambulance crew has a paramedic. One might be ten or twenty minutes out, so, in the meantime, the E.M.T., who isn't allowed to inject those drugs, will have to get creative. "You want cake? You want cookies? You want a cigarette?" Lies and threats, carrots and sticks; anything to get them on their way to the nearest hospital. The E.M.T. told me, "I don't want to use the word 'manipulative,' but you have to figure out a way to just fucking get them in the ambulance."

At the hospital, the patient is evaluated by a team of nurses and doctors in the emergency department. In New York City, this happens seventy thousand times a year. A little more than half of these patients—the ones in the worst shape—are then taken to the psychiatric unit. The hospital's job is to evaluate, stabilize, treat, discharge. Just as you don't depart the I.C.U. while you're having a stroke or bleeding out, you don't leave the psychiatric unit while you're in the throes of psychosis. Some people stay for months before being transferred to a state-run psychiatric hospital; others are discharged after only a few days, or are never admitted at all. Every day at Bellevue, the largest city-run hospital, there are usually about five or six patients downstairs, in the psychiatric emergency department, waiting for a bed. The average stay in the psychiatric unit is thirteen days. (One reason hospitals discharge people so quickly is that there are not enough inpatient psychiatric beds; high-quality psychiatric care is not as profitable as specialized spinal surgeries and hernia repairs.)

Almost every patient who comes in this way has a serious underlying condition—bipolar disorder, major depression, schizophrenia—that even a couple of weeks surrounded by nurses, doctors, and social workers cannot fix. In the late eighties, following a legal challenge to Koch's involuntary-hospitalization initiative, one judge described the city's approach as "revolving door mental health—that is, forcibly institutionalize, forcibly medicate, stabilize, discharge back into the same environment, and then repeat the cycle." Thirty-five years later, the vocabulary that's used to describe the city's mental-health-care system hasn't changed. "It's a revolving door," a cop who was working an overtime shift on a subway platform in Clinton Hill told me. "We bring them in, and the hospital just discharges them!" She and her partner both had a few streaks of gray in their tidy black hair, and wore matching N.Y.P.D. beanies. The second cop sighed. "In and out," she said. "I'm not sure anything we do is going to help if the hospitals keep letting them go."

The hospitals keep letting them go because they often have to. Patients can always refuse treatment or ask to be released; compelling someone to stay requires a court order from a judge, and the legal standard is high. The hospital must prove that the patient poses an immediate threat to himself or to others, and that his judgment is so impaired by his illness that he doesn't even understand that he



needs help. A psychiatrist at a city-run hospital sketched out a hypothetical scenario: Two men with paranoid schizophrenia arrive in the back of an ambulance, escorted by police. Both are living at homeless shelters, and neither has eaten in about five days. A doctor asks each man, "Why are you starving yourself to death?" The first says, "The voice of God is commanding me to go on a hunger strike!" The second replies, "The food at the shelter is disgusting. I'll eat when I have money to buy something good." Both men have a serious mental illness, but only the first will be made to stay at the hospital against his will. The second can walk out the door.

On a recent Tuesday morning, I visited the second floor of a shabby building on Rockaway Avenue, in Brownsville. Social workers were sitting in blue office chairs, surrounded by large Rubbermaid containers filled with granola bars, body lotion, sweatpants, toilet paper, detergent, and chocolate-chip cookies. The group is one of thirty-one Intensive Mobile Treatment teams, which care for the city's "frequent fliers" and "heavy hitters"—the four hundred or so men and women who are regularly and repeatedly admitted and discharged from city and state psychiatric units, or released from Rikers, where a fifth of incarcerated people have been diagnosed as having a severe mental illness. I.M.T. teams help people who have a history of chronic street homelessness and violent behavior; a psychiatric diagnosis is not on the list of admission criteria, but almost all I.M.T. clients have one.

Just after ten o'clock, someone turned down the volume on a TV in the office, and the team's leader, Lauren Schultz-Kappes, who wore bluejeans, yellow Nikes, and a silver heart necklace, began the day by giving an update on their twenty-seven clients. Tony was living in a shelter and recently went to a dentist appointment. J. B. Fresh had been staying at a nursing home and didn't like the food. Batsheva was transferred to a state-run hospital on Staten Island. Alex requested a Russian Orthodox Bible with large type and has become obsessed with juice. Markease was scheduled to receive his psychotropic medicine via intramuscular injection at a veterans' hospital. Merisa had court that afternoon. "She didn't seem to understand why it was wrong for her to pepper-spray the emergency room," Schultz-Kappes explained. "And she said, 'Why's it such a big deal?' So, we'll see how court goes today." The list went on: Fantasia was a little internally preoccupied again. Casper

was still street homeless. Raymond was still missing. Rene was doing all right. Marwan was back at Bellevue. "He's a weird mix of really lucid at times and then really not understandable," one of the social workers said.

Schultz-Kappes added, "And he's really loud."

New York has funded an alphabet soup of outreach groups and teams—M.C.T., B.R.C., S.O.S., ACT, B-HEARD, C.U.C.S., A.O.T., FACT, I.M.T.—each of which is different in origin, scale, and scope. A person with a mental illness is more likely to be the victim of a crime than to commit one, but every so often the script gets flipped. It's in those moments that local and state politicians feel compelled to talk about change. Assisted Outpatient Treatment was announced, in 1999, after a schizophrenic man, who had been in and out of psychiatric care and had stopped taking his medication, pushed a thirty-two-year-old woman named Kendra Webdale in front of an N train. Webdale died, and that year the state passed Kendra's Law, which allowed a court to mandate outpatient treatment, including psychotropic medication. (Around three thousand patients are currently under such orders.) City Hall launched I.M.T. teams in 2016, after a person with a mental illness killed a thirty-six-year-old woman named Ana Charle, who ran a homeless shelter in the Bronx.

In 2022, there was another horrific crime, another person failed by the system. Martial Simon, whose medical records included dozens of psychiatric hospitalizations, indicating that he was a serious threat to himself and to others, walked up to a forty-year-old woman named Michelle Go one morning and pushed her onto the subway tracks, where she was run over and killed by a train. Before the incident, Simon had been in the emergency room at Queens Hospital Center. A psychiatrist who treated him at another hospital told me, "If someone had just read his chart, it would have flagged for them 'Hey, this guy is the real deal.'" Instead, clinical staff decided that he was malingering, or faking his symptoms, and told him to leave.



"It's been so nice getting to interact with you for these past six years. Here's your first device."

The goal of most outreach teams is to get a patient from one point of care to the next—a complicated and difficult process. (A hundred thousand city residents with severe mental illness are not receiving any mental-health treatment.) Sometimes, when a person gets discharged from a hospital or released from Rikers, he'll leave with a pill bottle filled with thirty days' worth of Abilify, Ativan, or Haldol. Often, though, a person leaves with only a prescription, and it is not uncommon for it to be sent to a pharmacy that's far away from where he wants to end up—to a Walgreens in the Bronx, for instance, even though he is staying in a homeless shelter downtown. Several people who have stayed in shelters told me that, if they don't show up for a night to claim their bed, staffers throw away their medicine—along with everything else they own. (The city's Department of Homeless Services told me that, when someone does not return, shelters store their belongings for at least seven days.)

The waiting list to be treated by an I.M.T. team can be at least six months—and sometimes much longer—but once someone has been assigned they are in really good hands. A social worker named Bridgette Callaghan, who oversees six I.M.T. teams, said, "For the people that are, like, 'Go fuck yourself,' I'm, like, 'No problem, I will absolutely go do that. Can I grab you a cup of coffee first?' And they're, like, 'Yes, you can. But then leave!' That can be the first thing. And then, the next week, I'll show up with the coffee that I know they'll drink, and I'm, like, 'Hey, it's nice to see you again. Are you going to tell me to go fuck off again? Yes? All right, I'll see you next week.'" It takes months to build trust.

"I get it, social workers have not been great," Callaghan said. "And we're just another one—until we're not." I.M.T. teams take their clients to Yankee Stadium for baseball games and buy them Chinese food for lunch. (Each client costs taxpayers around eight hundred and forty dollars a



“Recommend? No. But there are plenty of dishes that I’d dare you to eat this evening.”

• •

week; admission to a city-run psychiatric unit, or incarceration on Rikers, is at least ten times that.) Clinicians administer medicine via intramuscular injection anywhere and everywhere—a Burger King bathroom, a Penn Station turnstile, an abandoned building where a client is hiding out. One nurse taught clients self-defense in Prospect Park. Another offers cooking classes.

Later on the afternoon that I visited the Brownsville team, clients began to show up. Cindy, who wore maroon leggings, violet nail polish, pink lipstick, and an oversized ruby-red ring, told me that she lives in a homeless shelter and attends group-therapy sessions. She preferred to talk about her outfit, though. “I love the color red,” she said. A social worker handed her a cup of hot chocolate. Nearby, a man named Brandon spun around in Schultz-Kappes’s office chair. He was supposed to get an injection that morning, but the team’s nurse had COVID, so he was shouting instead. A man named Joseph said, “Can I get a laptop?” Joseph had arrived in a dirty gray Marmot puffer carrying a wad of crumpled documents, including his birth certificate. He told me that he had been sleeping in the stairwell of his cousin’s building. “I just stay outside and play on my phone. That’s how I get my Netflix,” he said. Joseph added that the city had recently transferred him to a new homeless shelter in Far Rockaway—“Far Rock? I’m not going! It says take three trains!”—and that the last shelter had thrown away all his personal effects. “I’m used to starting from scratch. I like it. Or—I don’t like it,” he said, pausing. “It’s only material stuff. Expensive stuff, but— Can I get detergent? Laundry detergent?”

A social worker handed Joseph a jug of Tide. He was headed to Coney Island for a thirty-day temporary-housing program, arranged by the team. The residence offered toiletry kits, pajamas, beach towels, and a space for yoga. There was a bowl of fruit on the kitchen table, and a grill in the back yard. Joseph was a bit reluctant to go. “Do I gotta check in at ten o’clock?” he asked. Callaghan explained, “It’s not a hospital. You can come and go as you please. But there’s probably a curfew, and I know when you’re first moving in they’ll want to wash all your clothes, and you’ll probably have to take a shower.” Joseph gave a small nod. “I’ll give you a call when I get there,” he said.

In 1954, the Food and Drug Administration approved a new medication called Thorazine, which could be used to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. For the first time, it was possible to provide meaningful care for the mentally ill on an outpatient basis. In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, hundreds of thousands of patients across the country were released from derelict state-run asylums. (A key provision of the Medicare and Medicaid Act, passed in 1965, was that the federal government would no longer pay for care in that type of dedicated facility.) By one count, more than forty-seven thousand previously institutionalized patients moved to New York City. Some lived with families; others lived in single-room-occupancy hotels. When those closed down, in the late seventies and early eighties, people with mental illness started appearing in greater numbers on the city’s streets and subways. Most of the funding that had been promised by lawmakers for community-based outpatient care never arrived. The dream of deinstitutionalization collapsed. In 1985, the president of the American Psychiatric Association summed up the situation in an interview with a newspaper: “The chronic mentally ill patient has had his locus of living and care transferred from a single lousy institution to multiple wretched ones.”

Meanwhile, police and corrections officers became de-facto mental-health-care providers, one 911 call at a time. In 1999, the police responded to some sixty-four thousand calls about Emotionally Disturbed Persons, the official designation for people presenting symptoms of severe mental illness. (Mental-health advocates consider the label demeaning.) By 2022, the number of such calls had almost tripled; the city’s cops responded to nearly five hundred mental-health crises every day. The N.Y.P.D. is, in effect, the largest psychiatric-outreach team in America.

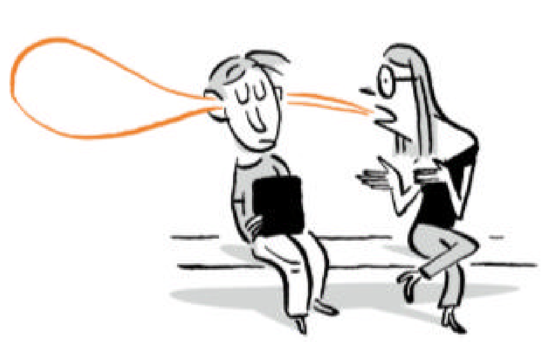
About a decade ago, under pressure from advocates, the Police Department began offering a four-day course, called Crisis Intervention Training, which

taught officers to use "active listening" and "de-escalation strategies" when approaching people with mental illness. (An early version of C.I.T. was developed by an instructor who also taught the department's hostage-negotiation course; he changed the background color of the slide deck.) Today, roughly forty per cent of N.Y.P.D. officers have received the training, during which improv actors pretend to have psychotic episodes in the department's "scenario villages," which include a bank vestibule, several apartments, and part of a subway car. But the city's 911 system can't specifically dispatch cops with that training to situations that would benefit from their expertise. (N.Y.P.D. officials recently told internal investigators that they are developing a "Next Generation 911" system, which may fix the problem; the last overhaul to the system, which was completed in 2004, cost more than two billion dollars.) Following Mayor Adams's November press conference, the N.Y.P.D. started to require additional training on how to identify someone who is experiencing a mental-health crisis. Nine of ten patrol cops have completed it. The training, which happens during roll call, and includes an at-home video component, lasts for twenty-five minutes.

According to a Washington *Post* database, since 2015 about a fifth of people killed by police nationwide have been in the midst of a mental-health crisis. An investigation by The City, a nonprofit news outlet in New York, found that, during a recent three-year stretch, fourteen people in such a crisis were killed by the N.Y.P.D. In those cases, most of the officers on the scene had not received C.I.T.; in one instance, the cop who killed a mentally ill person was the only responding officer who had not received it. But even a well-trained police officer is not the best person to defuse a mental-health emergency. Six weeks ago, two officers shot a forty-two-year-old homeless man in the midst of a schizophrenic episode. One had received C.I.T.; both had completed the Mayor's mandated mental-health training. The victim, Raul de la Cruz, was visiting his father's apartment to take a shower. He and his father got into an argument. His father called 311 for help, and de la Cruz picked up a knife. The call lasted twenty-three minutes; the cops shot Raul twenty-eight seconds after arriving on the scene.

One night in late November, two police officers working a shift in the subway came across a sixty-four-year-old homeless woman in need of assistance. She had a history of hospitalization and a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. They did not reach for handcuffs or call an ambulance. Instead, the cops escorted her to a nondescript office building in East Harlem. Around eleven o'clock, a receptionist buzzed them up to the second floor. A security guard searched the woman for weapons and needles, an intake nurse took her vitals, and a peer counsellor led her upstairs to a dormitory with three-inch mattresses, clean sheets, and a small dresser. The next morning, the woman met with a psychiatrist named Rob. "The cops were really nice," she explained. "They said that I should be in a new place."

The woman had landed at one of the city's two Support and Connection Centers, formerly known as Diversion Centers, where people with mental illness and substance-use problems can stay for five or ten days—a sort of way station where they can avoid the hospital or the criminal-justice system, at least for a little while. (Drug use and mental illness often go



hand in hand; Bridgette Callaghan, the I.M.T. social worker, told me, "Drugs are an unhealthy coping skill. But they *are* a coping skill. Everyone deserves some relief.") The Support and Connection Center program, modelled on similar ones in San Antonio, Kansas City, and Los Angeles, is good but not especially large. Since it opened, three years ago, the facility has served eight hundred and fifty people—a fraction of a per cent of the city's mental-health 911 calls during that period. "In five days, it can feel like we're not able to do a lot for people," Carli Wargo, who runs the center, told me. "What we can do is remind people that they're deserving of compassion and dignity and safety. That's something that the big system often forgets." She added, "We're not going to fix the system. It's just not possible. But when I hear, 'I felt safe there,' and 'I felt heard,' those are the biggest compliments." Guests can spend their time watching television or checking Facebook; they can also meet with clinicians and substance-use counsellors, apply for supportive housing, and attend various therapy sessions. Above some computers, someone had stuck a note, written in red marker:

> For whom it may concern! Take advantage of this 5-day rest period. Get your groove on the move. Pull your pants up & get to doing the dang thing.

Downstairs, the woman told the psychiatrist, Rob, that she became homeless two years ago after the friend she had been staying with died. She added that she experienced frequent panic attacks, difficulty sleeping, and schizophrenic delusions, and that she had been admitted to several inpatient psychiatric units. Her current psychotropic medicine, Risperdal, wasn't working. She didn't want anyone to take her vitals again. She wouldn't eat any solid food. "I have trouble trusting people," she said. A nurse brought her a nutritional shake, and the woman drank it. Then she said that she didn't want to go back to a hospital or to a homeless shelter, and that she didn't want to live in the subway anymore. "I need to go somewhere where people can help me out," she said. One day in early December, she was admitted to an assisted-living facility; that night, she disappeared.

In February, a man who police say was experiencing a mental-health crisis, and who had stopped taking his medication, rammed a U-Haul truck into several pedestrians and a police officer in South Brooklyn. Eight people were injured, and one died. Two weeks later, Mayor Adams gave another speech about his plan for people living

with severe mental illness. "This is the next phase," he said, pledging that the city would expand a pilot program that dispatched medical professionals instead of police officers to respond to most mental-health 911 calls. (The program had been widely criticized; last year, the average response time was more than fifteen minutes, and medical personnel weren't sent out during late-night hours.) The Mayor also announced seven million dollars in funding for mental-health clubhouses, where people with severe mental illness can meet with social workers and psychiatrists, and, what is perhaps more important, connect with one another—over a game of chess, an art project, a meal.

This winter, I visited some of the city's mental-health clubhouses. One afternoon, at Fountain House, in Hell's Kitchen, a man told me about the collapse of his business, in New Jersey, in 2014. "I had lost all my income, so I knew I was going to be homeless," he said. He was dressed in Gore-Tex boots, a red scarf, and a tight-fitting leather jacket. "My first option, at that time, was to commit suicide." We sat in a small room, and light streamed through a large window. Upstairs, social workers and counsellors discussed supportive-housing and Medicaid applications. Downstairs, a woman with three large tote bags handed out peppermint candies and pastel-colored lapel pins. "You can take up to twenty," she said. "Praise God!" On the second floor, the man with Gore-Tex boots spoke slowly and plainly. "I wanted to jump under a train," he said. "I didn't have the courage."

He went on, "Why would you want to expose yourself to the things that could happen through homelessness? Homelessness isn't just the condition of being without a home. It's the ultimate brutality. The fact that I'm here now, and all that's behind me, it wasn't given." He had spent three weeks in a homeless shelter, and a few years in rehab programs meant for alcoholics, and a few more at some halfway houses in Far Rockaway. "If the guy who owned the place didn't like the look of you, he'd come and give you a black garbage bag and say, 'Get the fuck out.' In that setting, there isn't any of this 'tenants' law,' or any of that crap. When I was first there, the road was unpaved. Just gravel. And every time it rained the water would build up about this high"—he used his hands to show me what a lot of water looked like—"and you were forced to walk through the water, and then you'd have to go through the whole day with wet feet."

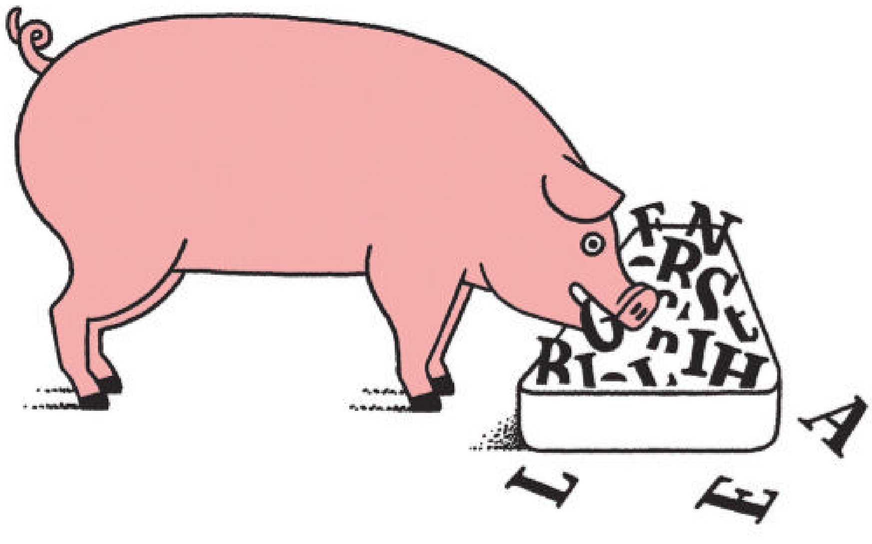
In 2017, he arrived at Fountain House, which helped get him a part-time job and connected him with supportive housing—his first apartment in four years. "For about six months, I didn't trust it," he said. "I bought a blow-up mattress and just slept on that and waited for them to come and kick me out. Slowly, it dawned on me that they weren't going to. And a certain amount of growth happened from there. The growth comes from security." It was quiet for a moment. "I've had just over five years of good stability," he said. "I haven't had any major incidents or anything for five years. The only thing is that about a week ago at my job I did have an incident with someone."

He wouldn't elaborate. Recently, when I tried to get back in touch with him, Nancy Young, who is a program director at Fountain House, told me that he didn't want to speak with me again. "He's had other incidents in the past," she said. "Sometimes he reaches out to me and sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes he self-corrects. Every single person here has a story like that. This is a place that helps people pick themselves up." Our conversation turned to Jordan Neely's death. "It's an us-and-them mentality," she said. "We don't feel connected to people with mental illness at all. We feel scared of them. It's easy for people to fall from a healthy place, and yet we blame them for not knowing how to make it in this world. It's scary when we see someone who reminds us that it could happen to any of us." She paused. "I wish we had found Jordan Neely. I wish we knew him. It could have been very different."

In and out. Around and around. One institution to the next: 7-Eleven, Kirby Forensic, Atlantic Armory, Manhattan Psychiatric, Maimonides, Lincoln, Kings County, Bellevue. Tonight, there are more than seventy thousand people without beds of their own sleeping in homeless shelters and temporary-housing programs and other places, too. Some shelters have kitchens that serve freshly stewed chicken thighs and homemade strawberry pie; others serve chicken that is undercooked and mealy apples for dessert. Many shelter beds are seven inches off the ground and bolted to the floor. For the mentally ill, there are forty-nine hundred beds in mental-health shelters, but more than forty-nine hundred people want to sleep in them. And so tonight mentally ill men and women are sleeping in large intake shelters, on the street, in the trains. Tomorrow, they will wake up and go about their day.

Patrol cops will help them, and harass them, and call ambulances, which will pick them up and take them to the hospital, often but not always against their will. Some will stay there for a long time. Others will leave after lunch. The most fortunate among them will meet with their I.M.T. or ACT or A.O.T. teams—nurses, behavioral specialists, social workers turned friends. They will also go to the deli for breakfast, to the train station, to their jobs, to the grocery store. They'll sit down and rest for a while, in a plastic chair at the library, or on a park bench, under a favorite sycamore tree.

Recently, at the Hoyt-Schermerhorn subway station, in Brooklyn, I watched as a woman walked slowly toward the painted yellow line at the edge of the platform. It was a Saturday afternoon, and the woman was dressed in a long gray parka with the hood pulled up. She was wearing reflective bicycling gloves and dirty suède boots; her hands were moving in wobbly circles above her head, almost as if she were dancing. She looked and looked into the tunnel; usually, people don't stand so close to the tracks for so long. As the train screeched into the station, the woman sprinted toward the yellow line. The train thundered past; she stopped. Then the doors opened, and strangers poured onto the platform. The woman boarded the crowded train. Inside, several people made idle chitchat. A few others looked down at their phones. ♦



LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

TRANSLATION

BY IAN FRAZIER

I grew up multilingual and learned in earliest childhood to switch effortlessly between languages. Even today, I find myself going back and forth, sometimes even in the same *entence-say*. You'll notice that I did it just *en-thay*. Because I am aware of how frustrating it is when people drop foreign-language expressions into their speech and expect the listener to understand, I will translate: *entence-say*, in English, is the singular noun "sentence," and *en-thay* is the temporal adverb "then."

The earthy, untrammelled, and lyrical other language that I'm referring to was derived originally from Latin, hence its common name, Pig Latin. Among linguists, it's known as Demotic Ay-speak, for the sake of precision, and to remove any allusion to pigs (which have nothing to do with the language). Other members of my linguistic community will tell you that I'm fiercely proud of my fluency and stand up for the language whenever it is misused. I even prefer to read novels in it, because it makes me feel at home. I first encountered the P.-L. version of olstoy-Tay's "anna-Yay arenina-Kay" in the abridged translation done by Mrs. Erwin's fifth graders. The principal translator, Billy Nolan, was a fully proficient speaker.

Recently, I returned to the novel, this time in its unabridged original form, translated by Evelyn Hummel, who apparently is an adult. Much of the childlike joy imparted to the text by Nolan and his fellow-translators has been lost, I'm sorry to report. Mr. Hummel begins the first chapter ponderously: "*All-yay appy-hay amilies-fay are-yay alike-yay. . . .*" Nolan, in contrast, had chosen to leave out that sentence entirely and substitute one about how his "*ad-day*" ("dad") was an "*ofessional-pray estler-wray*" ("professional wrestler"). (Nolan's father did, in fact, wrestle professionally, under the ring name The Genius.) When questioned about opening the novel in this way, Nolan *fils* said that he felt it was the duty of the translator to convey the spirit of the original rather than hide behind word-for-word literalness—and I would agree.

Strangely, I never heard my own parents speak the language, although I now think that they must have understood it. How I picked it up while being raised by two monolingual English speakers, I have no idea. My brother and sister and I spoke it freely among ourselves. If our parents somehow figured out what we were saying, we could switch to Op-Talk, Backward Talk (also known as Yoda Talk), Pirate-Speak, and so-called Repeating Talk. (Parents: "Cut that out." Us: "Cut that out.") I'm afraid that our polyglot skills confused and frustrated them terribly.

In my professional life, I became a writer, but I never forsook my childhood languages—although English, the tongue of the oppressor-parents, was to be avoided. I wrote my first memoir entirely in Pig Latin and never felt so free. When I completed a manuscript that I was happy with, I hired an expert to translate it into French, a language I do not speak. Wanting to publish the book in both the U.S. and the U.K., I then translated the French version into English on my own by simply guessing at the meanings. As well-informed readers will recall, the work that resulted went on to win many prizes. What interested me even more was the velocity and refraction achieved by looking at a text through these differing lenses.

As for Mr. Hummel, he compounded his offenses by writing a screenplay of the novel he translated. He should have stuck to English; the results were distressing. (Full disclosure: as a leading Pig Latin linguist and scholar, I was hired as the intimacy coach for "anna-Yay arenina-Kay"'s love scenes.) Unfortunately, the film's actors were not up to the challenges of Hummel's script. To provide the correct lilt to this musical tongue, you must practice the crucial "ay" phoneme, so that you make your sentences sing. If you don't master it, you're at a disadvantage speaking dialogue in which literally every word ends with that sound.

My real fear, of course, is that one day Pig Latin will die out. I can't imagine that this movie will make people more inclined to learn it. Recently, I saw a map that showed where the language is still spoken. In most of the world outside the U.S., it exists only in very tiny pockets, if at all. According to studies, the higher a person's I.Q., the less likely that the person will be familiar with Pig Latin—the exact opposite of what one would expect. In tsarist Russia, the business of the court was conducted entirely in French, and the upper classes communicated only in that language. I dream that one day the élites of both coasts in the U.S., and of all the major cities worldwide, will, in a similar way, develop a special language among themselves that only they are able to understand. Why not give Pig Latin a try? ♦

THE WORLD OF FASHION

THE BLING KING

Philipp Plein's maximalist designs.

BY NAOMI FRY



Philipp Plein, the forty-five-year-old German fashion designer, is thin and muscular, with stiffly gelled hair, a stubbled jawline, and arms covered in tattoos (the word "Billionaire" in fat lettering; a cross with "Veni Vidi Vici"; a sad-faced Jesus). Since founding his eponymous clothing brand, in the late nineteen-nineties, Plein has become an effective hawker of loudly luxurious wares, beloved by customers with a taste for the extravagant, if often sneered at by the fashion establishment. His runway shows are elaborate affairs, featuring pyrotechnics and, occasionally, Jet Skis. "I'm trying to fuck your mind tonight," he told an audience in Milan, in 2015. For that show, which was opened by the rapper Azealia Banks, Plein had a roller coaster (which some of the models rode) installed on the catwalk, leading to media speculation that the event may have been "the most expensive fashion show ever."

Plein serves as his brand's best living advertisement. He mostly wears clothing of his own design: skinny leather pants with a wealth of zippers; skull-emblazoned sweaters; chunky sneakers with a prominent Philipp Plein double-"P" logo; slim-cut jackets in exotic-animal pelts; oversized crystal-studded watches. His naughty-playboy look combines elements of well-off hair-metal rocker in his dotage, white hip-hop impresario, and "Jersey Shore" cast member. "Which hetero guy in the world wouldn't want to look like this?" his global wholesale director, Fabien Girardi, asked me.

Celebrity fans of the brand include the actor Nicolas Cage, the soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo, and New York City's mayor, Eric Adams. "The Plein look is very West Coast aughts," the fashion podcaster James Harris said. "It's the rhinestones, the skulls, the gaudy T-shirts with huge logos. It's for people who want to make sure everybody can tell that they've spent a thousand dollars on a bedazzled T-shirt." There are important antecedents to Plein's maximalist style, especially among Italian designers—Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, and Roberto Cavalli, to name a few—but the fashion world isn't where Plein looks for inspiration. "Elon Musk is my hero," he told me. "I like underdogs." A menswear-magazine writer I spoke to referred to Plein as "the Andrew Tate of fashion," comparing the designer to the oily former kickboxing champion and men's-rights media personality. The *New York* magazine writer Matthew Schneier told me, "The press has never really liked Plein. But a certain kind of customer just loves him."

The Philipp Plein line comprises men's, women's, and children's clothing, along with timepieces, eyewear, perfume, and a recently unveiled home collection. (The kids' collection includes faux-leather biker jackets retailing for more than twenty-one hundred dollars and leopard-print leggings retailing for two hundred.) Last year, the Plein brand had a net global revenue of two hundred and fifteen million euros, on a par with luxury brands such as Thom Browne and Dries Van Noten. The goods are sold in ninety-five dedicated Philipp Plein shops and in more than five hundred multi-brand luxury boutiques worldwide. The designer also owns a men's high-end tailoring brand called Billionaire, and he just launched a third line, Plein Sport, offering sneakers and activewear at a lower price point than is available in his main collection. (The cheapest pair of Plein Sport sneakers is a hundred and twenty-five dollars.) Plein has high expectations for the new venture, which he hopes will become a premium alternative to brands such as Nike and Puma. "We're opening three hundred Plein Sport stores in the next thirty-

One menswear-magazine writer described Plein as "the Andrew Tate of fashion."

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIELLE LEVITT

six months," he told me in Los Angeles, this past December. "This is the future." He had arrived earlier that morning from Munich, where he had just received an award from the entrepreneur and motivational speaker Jürgen Höller. (Though Plein delivered his acceptance speech in German, he finished it in English, with the words "Fuck the haters," a phrase he apparently likes so much that he had it inlaid—with the addendum "before they fuck you"—on a conference table at his company's headquarters.)

Plein owns homes around the world: in Lugano, Switzerland, in Cannes, and on New York's Upper East Side. (He also owns a fleet of luxury vehicles, among them four Rolls-Royces—"a Ghost in L.A., a Cullinan in New York, a Dawn in the South of France, and a Phantom in Switzerland," he told me.) In 2014, he bought Chateau Falconview, a two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar mansion in Los Angeles, whose build-out on a Bel Air hilltop has proved so ambitious and complicated that it is still under way, nine years later. While the main residence, a twenty-five-thousand-square-foot structure, is in progress, another house on the property has been completed, and, on the evening we met, Plein was opening its doors for the launch of two pairs of special-edition sneakers he had designed with the hip-hop entertainer Snoop Dogg, in a collaboration named #PLEINDOGG.

Technically a guesthouse, the three-bedroom home has a high-rococo opulence reminiscent of Liberace's Vegas boudoir, and is crowded to near-explosion with crystal chandeliers, gilded frames, velvet ottomans, faux-Roman statuary, and a leopard-print ceiling. A mirror that doubles as a television in one bedroom flashes with the digitized words "I fucking love fucking you." Outside the house's marble entrance, Plein had parked a yellow lowrider Impala convertible, from the 1996 music video for the Tupac Shakur track "To Live and Die in L.A.," next to a yellow-and-purple sneaker the size of a Mini Cooper. It was a comically enlarged version of one of the #PLEINDOGG models. (The shoe it was based on, which is encrusted with crystals, retails for more than sixty-four hundred dollars on the Plein Web site, where, like all other Plein products, it's also available for purchase with bitcoin.) "It smells so-o-o good," a guest said, as she passed by the gargantuan sneaker. "Is it cake?" She peered more closely at the dense surface. It was cake.

Inside the house, Snoop Dogg, who was wearing a sequinned Plein zip-up and blinged-out sunglasses, with his twisted braids tied back in a long ponytail, was posing for pictures. "This is the greatest collaboration I've ever been a part of, real talk," the rapper told a video crew, his voice low and slow. He said that his contribution to the project consisted of selecting the shoe's "L.A. Lakers colors." Plein chimed in: "Snoop is very L.A., he represents L.A., he's L.A., he stands for L.A., it's all about L.A." The designer was wearing tight leather pants and a baggy, wildly patterned black-and-white cardigan with the Plein logo on the back. When the Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee entered the party with his wife, the Internet personality Brittany Furlan Lee, Plein jumped to his feet to greet them. "Tommy fucking Lee! What's up, baby?" he said. "And there's wifey!"

A few dozen guests milled around, sipping flutes of champagne and posing for selfies, as R. Kelly's "Ignition (Remix)" played from the speakers. Many of the male guests resembled Plein—tight T-shirts and tighter jackets, heavy watches and heavier cologne. The women in the room sported a kind of high-femme maximalism, with snug-fitting gowns, vertiginous platform heels, and faces variously hollowed and inflated by a dermatologist's needle. One of the guests, Kristy Garett, a model and influencer, told me that she lives in Milan and Los Angeles. Lithe and blond, she was wearing a shimmering, emerald-colored body-con Plein minidress, inlaid with thousands of tiny rhinestones. "Usually, these dresses are so heavy and stiff, but with this one I feel like I have nothing on," she told me. As she turned around to show off the gown's low back, it struck me that such a dress—delicate and intricate, yet still able to withstand the chaos and drunken revelry of the kind of event at which it would realistically be worn, was, in its own way, a feat. Plein refuses to design garments that are stuffy or unyielding, even though high fashion has long been associated with pain and discomfort. (Consider Kim Kardashian's intense and possibly Ozempic-fuelled weight-loss journey to squeeze into Marilyn Monroe's "naked" gown—another rhinestone-covered, form-fitting dress—for the 2022 Met Gala.) Plein's clothes are meant for their wearers to have fun in, which is part of what makes them sexy.

Out on the balcony, Tommy Lee was smoking a Marlboro. In 2022, he had walked in the Philipp Plein spring-summer 2023 show in Milan before playing the drums bare-chested on a raised platform that hovered over the runway. He and his wife live in Calabasas, but they are renovating a Brentwood house not far from Plein's, which they told me was designed in a Japanese style. "You go in there and you're, like, Am I in fucking Kyoto?" Lee said. He was wearing a wide-brimmed hat, ripped skinny jeans, and a gold-and-diamond Death Row Records pendant that Snoop Dogg had given him. One of his cheekbones was tattooed with Japanese characters.

Lee went on enthusiastically, "Philipp gets it. We've seen it all, we've done it all, it's really hard to stand out. So you gotta go extra fucking big."

"I mean, look at this place," Furlan Lee said, gesturing at the house.

"It's fucking Disneyland!" Lee said.

The history of fashion in the past century has been one of a toggle between excess and restraint. Periods of asceticism, stylistic and otherwise, have alternated with eras of overt opulence—take Dior's voluminous and ultrafeminine New Look ushering in a lavish silhouette after the leanness of the Second World War years, or the glitzy eighties follies of Christian Lacroix giving way to the minimalism of Jil Sander and Calvin Klein in the nineties.

More recently, following the logomania and maximalism of the early two-thousands, which spawned the Philipp Plein line, fashion has seen a return to a low-key, less easily identifiable type of luxury—a trend known as "stealth wealth." In a period of economic and political turmoil, even the rich, as the style reporter Lauren Sherman has noted in her newsletter for the Web site Puck, have "stopped wanting to look so obviously *rich*." This is the kind of style that we see, for instance, on HBO's "Succession": Logan Roy is a billionaire, and he'll wear a Loro Piana baseball cap that retails for upward of five hundred dollars, but the cap is logo-less, and made

of dark, sober cashmere. It's consumption of the IYKYK sort, conspicuous only if you can pick up on its signs.

This mentality is anathema to Plein. "When I started out, if I'd have tried to sell a black cashmere sweater, no one would have bought it, because who the fuck is Plein? I was a brand nobody knew," he said. (The designer made a similar comment before presenting his collection at New York Fashion Week in 2017, at a show where Madonna, Kylie Jenner, and Paris Hilton sat in the front row. "People always ask me, Who the fuck is Philipp Plein?" he said. "I'm just a dreamer and a believer.")

It was the morning after the party in Bel Air, and Plein was sitting in his immaculate kitchen, eating almonds from a vacuum-sealed bag. He doesn't smoke, drink, or do drugs ("I just love to drive fast"), so despite his late night he looked fresh in his fitted, heavily distressed jeans and bright-white sneakers. He spoke in a hustler's excitable clip. "I understood that I had to have a product that was different," he continued, "so, if I put on a cashmere sweater 'Fuck you all' in Swarovski crystals, I could sell it for five thousand dollars." He paused, registering my surprise. "Yes, five thousand dollars! Even at Loro Piana, they wouldn't do that! And so, the business model is really very simple. Everything has to be rich, has to be loud, has to be in your face."

Plein isn't shy about expressing his disdain for the fashion industry. "Designers are like football players, or modern prostitutes," he said. "Brands use them as long as they enjoy them and, once they don't enjoy them, they are exchanged." He popped a couple of almonds into his mouth. "It happened now even with Alessandro." Plein was referring to Alessandro Michele, the designer who, for nearly a decade, had produced a gaudy iteration of Gucci, but had recently exited his role as creative director after sales had fallen. Since Plein's company is independent and self-financed ("We don't have loans or nothing!"), he can afford to stick to the niche aesthetic his clientele loves, never veering from the path he started forging two decades ago, and trusting that the trend pendulum will, at one point or another, likely swing back in his direction. "The vulgarity is the point," Buzz Bissinger, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and the author of "Friday Night Lights," told me. (Bissinger, who has written about his infatuation with luxury, owns many Plein pieces.)

Plein's celebrity customers are generally not quite A-list, but many of the personalities who do wear his brand, such as Ronaldo, are known for peacocking, helping attract the kind of consumers who feel an affinity for a flashy, no-fucks-given attitude. ("If their Lambo is in green, they want their crocodile or python jacket and shoes color-coördinated to it," Ernst Fisher, who runs a Philipp Plein boutique in Vienna, said.) Some of these celebrities, including Cage, Hilton, and Lindsay Lohan, who once served as the face of the Philipp Plein line, have been subject to the same cultural shifts as the designer. They are figures who went from being genuine stars to punch lines and then, after some collective critical reëvaluation, to cultural icons, if mostly ironic ones. There's arguably something radical in waiting for the culture to come back to you, instead of contorting yourself around the finicky expectations of the current era.

The fashion establishment's tendency to pretend that it is above Plein's kind of client—the unapologetic nouveau riche—angers the designer. "Who likes to spend money? Who likes to show off? The new rich!" he told me. "And we're all living off these people!" He mentioned the rise of Russia as a luxury-consumer market: "Everybody suddenly had *matryoshka* designs—Chanel, Gucci,



Dolce. Everyone! Then it was China, because these are emerging markets, and these people had never seen anything, and they became rich in a very short period of time, and they make money fast and they spend money fast. But then these brands say, 'Us? Oh, no, no!' Because they're embarrassed." He, however, has no problem admitting which demographic he's aiming for. (His biggest markets, he told me, are Eastern and Central Europe.)

While Plein was talking, Wayne Schneider, a heavyset luxury-car dealer and auto-body-shop owner, entered the kitchen. Schneider, who seems to be both a friend and an all-around fixer for Plein, was wearing wraparound sunglasses and a diamond chain. "Wayne, you look like a drug dealer," Plein said. He explained that Schneider had arrived to pick up the sneaker cake, which was still sitting outside, to take it down to Los Angeles's Skid Row and feed the homeless. Plein told me that Schneider organizes a weekly soup kitchen for the unhoused in New York, to which the designer also donates funds and provisions. ("And, by the way, Mayor Adams comes all the time, and Wayne even gave him a Philipp Plein watch.")

Schneider also helps Plein realize some of his more extravagant schemes. Cutting excitedly into each other's words, the two recounted how Schneider had once devised a plan to insert a Ferrari Testarossa ("If you remember 'Miami Vice'") into a SoHo retail space for a Plein pop-up where the rap group Migos was set to perform.

"The hoisting company said, We can do this job, but it would be a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and Mercer Street between Canal and Houston has to be shut down," Schneider said. "So instead we took the car apart on the sidewalk. Zero permits!"

Plein broke in. "But do you know how he blocked the street?"

"I called up this friend—"

"His friend has a truck," Plein continued, "and he pretended to have a flat tire, and it was a huge truck, so, while they fixed the tire, he was, like, We can get the car in."

"We got it in sideways," Schneider said.

"He's a legend, this guy," Plein said.

"One time, it's Labor Day weekend, and Plein tells me, 'I want to do a car rally in New York,'" Schneider said. "So we went on social media, and we got one hundred and fifty cars. And we did them in increments."

"No permits," Plein said.

"Zero permits! I said, 'All Porsches, come eight-thirty to nine. Lambos, nine to nine-thirty.'"

"This was at the Plaza, where my office is."

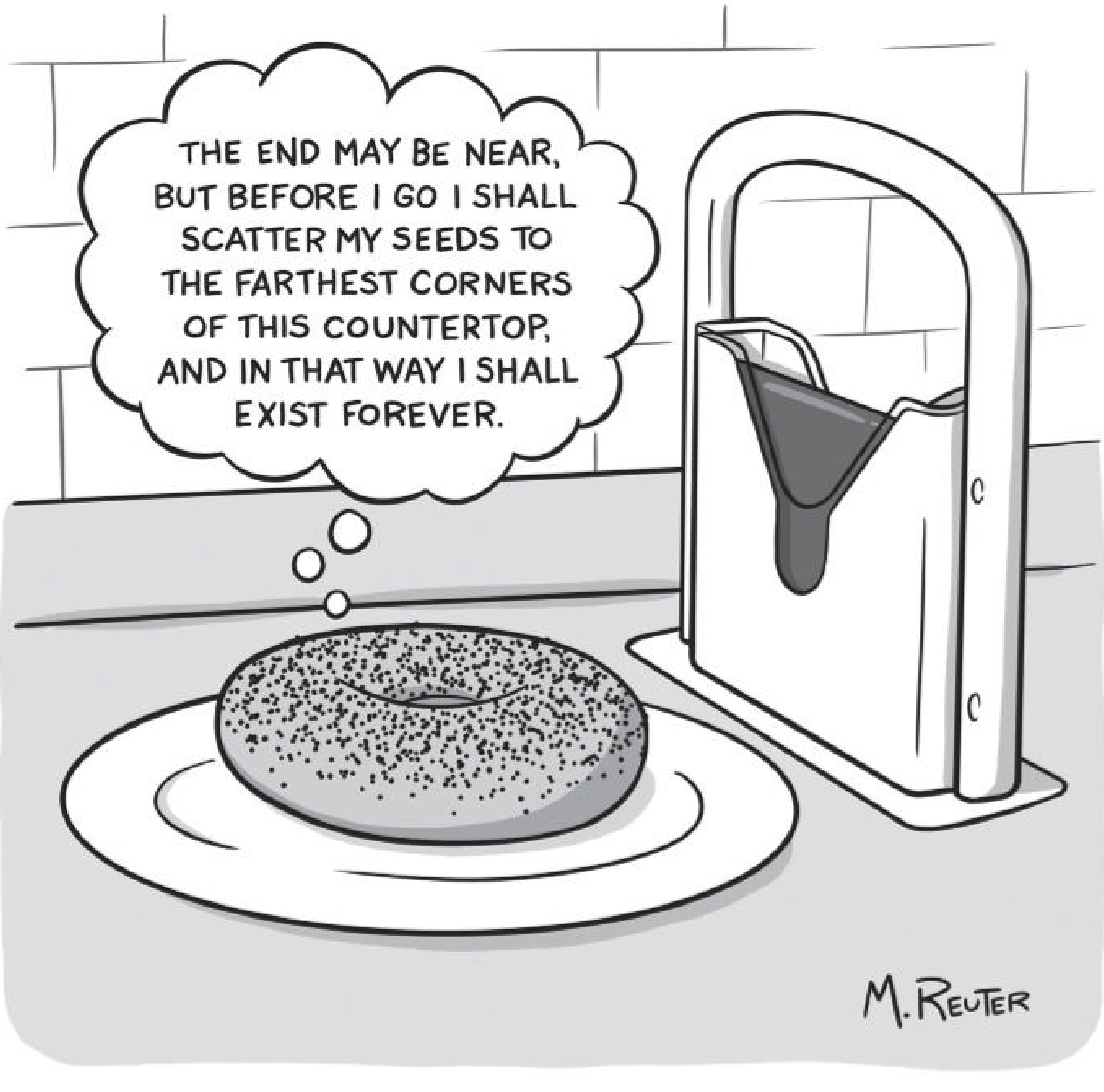
Schneider pulled out his iPhone and

hit Play on a video of a honk-heavy midtown snarl of ostentatious vehicles. "You see, so many Lamborghinis, there's no room, they had to go the wrong direction down Fifth Avenue. Then the McLarens came."

"We ended up unofficially shutting down Times Square for fifteen minutes. Can you imagine?" Plein said. His voice rose in excitement. "Gucci would never do that, do you understand? I do stuff for the people! And the people love us! They are like us!"

Plein told me that he considers himself apolitical ("I don't care about politics, I care about my business and my fashion"), but his self-positioning as an underdog hero of the common man, who is successful despite the falsity and the snobbery of the élites, is undeniably Trumpian. In 2017, for his New York Fashion Week début, Plein adopted the slogan "Let's Make NYFW Great Again." (Tiffany Trump also sat in the front row at his show that year.) Plein and his acolytes might believe that the culture will eventually come back around and embrace them, but that doesn't mean that the wait for the next shift—and the pretentiousness that has flourished in the meantime—hasn't left them feeling somewhat embittered. "It's a community based around the fact that those that are in won't accept us," James Harris, the fashion podcaster, told me. "That's how streetwear was born, that's how punk was born, but when it's purely about cutthroat wealth and conspicuous consumption it's just twisted."

Leaving Chateau Falconview, I found myself in my rental car right behind a truck whose flatbed was occupied by the enormous sneaker, which was largely uneaten, save for a watermelon-size gash in its toe cap. I watched the cake, its sponge now slightly soggy, as it jostled gently to and fro down Bel Air Road, on its way to Skid Row.



• •

Plein grew up in a middle-class family in Munich. His mother was a housewife; his father, who is no longer alive, was a doctor and an alcoholic. "He was not very nice to my mother," Plein said. When Plein was three, his parents divorced, and mother and son had some hard years, briefly living with Plein's grandmother and moving around frequently. Plein switched schools several times. Life became more stable after his mother remarried and had a second child with her new husband, also a doctor, who treated Plein like his own son. But Plein's early-childhood experiences left their mark. "I've always felt like an outsider," he said.

When Plein was a teen-ager, his family moved to Nuremberg, where he began booking modelling gigs and cleaned ashtrays at a night club. ("They wanted good-looking kids to work there," he told me, pulling up a picture on his phone so that I could see him posing on the cover of a 1995 issue of the German teen magazine *Bravo Girl!*—a grinning, shirtless boy with a surfer's blond bob.) He was thrilled by the fast money he could make in night life, but his mother and stepfather, unhappy that he was neglecting his studies, sent him to boarding school. Once more, he was the new kid, and he struggled to adjust to the school's preppy environment. "I cut my hair like Harry Potter and wore polo shirts," he told me. "And then, after two months, I decided, I don't want to blend in anymore."

In the nineties, Plein began attending law school in Nuremberg. ("I wanted to study about the rights we have as human beings," he told *Women's Wear Daily*, in 2014.) But he didn't like being a student who was financially dependent on his parents. He had happened upon a newspaper article about the profitability of the pet-supply industry and had come up with an idea that he felt would be a surefire money-maker. Flush with a small inheritance he had received after his grandfather's death, he designed and produced a luxury dog bed—a clean-lined, Le Corbusier-style metal and faux-leather mini-sofa for the pooch that wants for nothing, which he sold for fifteen hundred dollars. "The production price was five hundred, and I thought, If I sell one thousand, I'll make a million. And I really wanted to make a million," he told me. The bed was a hit—Plein made his million—and he dropped out of school and began to produce furniture meant for human customers as well as accessories and clothing. His design language coalesced into what has since become his familiar, neo-Baroque vernacular, though he

claims that this had nothing to do with his own taste. He'd in fact always liked Bauhaus-influenced design, he told me, and things that were "simple as fuck." But, after consistently selling out of pillows and jackets that he adorned with Swarovski crystals as an experiment, he began to realize that people liked bling, and so he "gave them what they wanted."

On a Friday morning in January, Plein pulled up in a Mercedes G-Class S.U.V. at his headquarters in Lugano, across the border from Italy. His company has been based in the city for the past decade, and he lives there during the week. Switzerland offers considerable tax incentives to foreign businesses such as Plein's, making it a popular place of operation for international fashion brands. But Plein also likes Lugano for its high quality of life and utopian lakeside vibe—"It's the Disneyland of Switzerland," he told me—a far cry from what he sees as the real-world bleakness of Milan, where his showroom is situated. "Milan is dirty, it's so ugly," he said. "I would never live there." On the weekends, he drives to his estate in Cannes, which he shares with his girlfriend, Lucia Bartoli, a vegan chef and a social-media influencer, and their one-year-old son, Rocket Halo Ocean. (Bartoli is now pregnant with their second child, and Plein also has a ten-year-old son, Romeo, from a previous relationship, who lives with his mother in Rio de Janeiro.) With pillowy lips and a pneumatic figure, Bartoli, who is British, seems perfectly made to represent the Plein brand, which she often does on Instagram. (In one recent post, she is squatting in crystal stiletto platforms, leather leggings, and a sparkly jacket, with the words "Fuck me like you hate me!" in mirrored lettering on the wall beside her.)

Plein, charging up the stairs to the fifth floor of the handsome marble-and-glass office building, seemed even more kinetic than usual. He energetically pointed out elements of the décor along the way, including several paintings by Alec Monopoly, the American graffiti artist beloved by the YouTuber Jake Paul and the reality-TV star Scott Disick. (One painting was made on actual dollar bills: "This is illegal, you know.") Plein had a couple of big days ahead of him. That night, he was staging a show of his tailoring brand, Billionaire, as part of Milan's men's fashion week; the next day, he was hosting a large-scale presentation and party for the Plein Sport line. Reaching his office, he sat down for a meeting with Olga Burfan, the head of his global e-commerce operation, to view N.F.T.s that would be rolled out alongside the online launch of a collection of Plein Sport sneakers.

Watching a screen above his desk, Plein began going over the N.F.T.s—a series of videos of complicated-looking running shoes in various vivid hues orbiting in space, not unlike the bone in Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey." The black-and-gold colorway was his favorite, he said. But he seemed distracted. He was stressed because the rapper Tyga, who had been booked to play a set at the Plein Sport party, had fallen ill and cancelled his appearance at the last minute. "I have five thousand people coming tomorrow," Plein told Burfan. "Worst case, I'll perform." He smiled thinly, and spritzed himself with one of a number of Plein fragrances arrayed on his desk.

Jason Derulo, the pop and R. & B. singer, had agreed to stand in for Tyga, but, Plein said, one of the brand's executives was against that choice, and pushing instead for the British drill rapper Central Cee, whom Plein had never heard of. "She has this complex about being cool," Plein said, of the executive. "When she heard about Derulo, she was, like, He's the worst, he makes me want to puke, I won't come." He went on, "She's a girl who's, like, too fashion." He raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips to mimic a snooty expression. "When you're too fashion, the people don't understand it."

Then, abruptly, he turned back to the matter at hand, quickly approving the videos that Burfan showed him. "*Va bene*, super, super," he said. "So, everything is under control. Money never sleeps."

Back in his Mercedes, on the way to the showroom in Milan, Plein talked with his P.R. reps about the Derulo conundrum. "He's big on TikTok, he has a lot of hits, Italians like him," Plein said. "He's a little bit cheesy, O.K., but he's a nice guy—he loves the brand." The conversation then turned to other aspects of the party, which was to take place at a hangar on the outskirts of the city, and on which, Plein said, he had already spent more than eight hundred thousand euros. R.S.V.P.s were looking good, and a long line outside the venue would be all but guaranteed. "We have an amazing, huge location. We need to get a return on our investment," he said. He asked, jokingly,



"I only wish there was room for all three of us."

whether it would be possible to have police helicopters, with searchlights, flying above the crowd outside the event, but seemed to accept that that wouldn't be possible.

The car crossed from Switzerland into Italy, where, Plein told me, the approach to speeding is more relaxed. He gunned the Mercedes up to a hundred and seventy k.p.h. "This isn't fast even," he said, as I clung to the door handle.



Plein's showroom—a multistory building whose interiors are clad in the designer's usual marble, chrome, and crystal—sits on a quiet side street in the heart of Milan. Entering the space, he checked in on a collection of Billionaire items that would be presented to an intimate group of clients and buyers later that day. "You have nothing like this on the market—look at these details," he said, fingering the cuff of a black python overshirt. (Retail price: thirteen thousand four hundred dollars.) "It's all the most expensive fabrics. We have the best silk from Como." He picked up a crocodile loafer, then put it back down. Billionaire is "a maximalist brand, like Plein, but it's more classic," he said. It is meant for an older client: "This is for the sugar daddy. He's in his fifties, he has a beautiful home in Palm Springs or Miami. In the summer, he's in Saint-Tropez. He has a young girlfriend and a fast car."

Four times a year, Plein's designers spend a week at one of his houses, where they put together a new collection. Plein likes to focus on the graphic elements of the clothing, in particular, working alongside one of his head designers, Simone Scalia, who has been with him for seven years. Earlier in the week, Plein said, Scalia was looking through the Dolce & Gabbana Web site when he happened upon a Hawaiian-print design that he thought looked a lot like one that he and Plein had come up with the year before. "I'm not going to do anything with this," Plein said. "I have many of these examples. But, listen, obviously I'm not everyone's darling. I am not liked by those people." He went on, "Look at me, I'm different, I do what I want, I do what I like." A few minutes later, he was trotting up the stairs to the building's top floor, to check out the Plein Sport merchandise. "Ah, this is where you smell the money," he said.

There are troubling elements to the Plein world view: the antagonism, the obsession with material success, the portrayal of his brand as a populist business venture despite the fact that even his cheaper offerings, from the Plein Sport line, are still above what most people would be able—or willing—to spend on something as supposedly serviceable as a pair of running shoes. And yet there's something to respect, if not necessarily revere, about Plein's straightforwardness, his acknowledgment that fashion has become, in his words, "too fashion." The designer's blazing spoils are probably a more apt and honest reflection of our fiddle-while-Rome-burns cultural moment than any number of muted cashmere sweaters.

At 9 P.M. the next day, a long line was snaking in front of the event space where the Plein Sport presentation was being staged. Inside, Plein, who was wearing a leather biker jacket over a muscle shirt, was walking a clutch of guests around the cavernous, smoky, still mostly empty space, which was illuminated by sweeping green laser beams. Jason Derulo was set to perform, though he arrived, to some consternation, on crutches, having injured his foot during a basketball game back home in Los Angeles.

Deafening house music was thumping on the powerful sound system, and Plein orated loudly as he showed off the new collection—colorfully patterned and logoed activewear, sneakers, and parkas—presented in large glass display cases churning with fake snow, creating a "Blade Runner"-meets-Pacha effect. "We're opening three hundred stores in the next thirty-six months," Plein said, as if for the first time. He led the group outside, to a McLaren motor home that had been refurbished as a pop-up store. "Welcome to the Plein Sport experience!" he cried, ushering his guests into the vehicle. "Don't be shy! You can touch the truck, you can touch the product!" ♦



A REPORTER AT LARGE

HUNTING THE HUNTERS

A conservation N.G.O. infiltrates wildlife-trafficking rings to bring them down.

BY TAD FRIEND

The Korean barbecue joint near L.A. wasn't a crime scene, exactly. But on a muggy fall afternoon two of Mexico's top wildlife traffickers sat in the back, eating lunch and talking shop. One of their most profitable lines of business is smuggling the buoyancy bladders of an endangered fish called the totoaba. The scab-colored bladders are remarkably yucky-looking, and the effort to harvest them from the Sea of Cortez has driven the vaquita porpoise to the verge of extinction. But they taste great in soup and make your skin glow! Or so the folk wisdom has it. They've become costly enough in China—as much as fifty thousand dollars a kilogram—that they are often bestowed as gifts or bribes or simply cherished as collectibles, like Fabergé eggs.

The traffickers, Harry and Tommy, were Chinese. Harry, tall and pudgy, stayed bent over his chopsticks, while Tommy often stood to pace and talk on his phone. Both men believed that their host, Billy, a friend of several years, was a Hong Kong businessman who wanted to use their smuggling route. In fact, Billy, who was recording their conversation on his iPhone, was an operative for an N.G.O. called Earth League International. (I have used a pseudonym for anyone identified by a single name.) ELI intends to stop the global trade in rhino horn, elephant ivory, shark fins, lizards, ploughshare tortoises, Queen Alexandra's birdwing butterflies, and more than seven thousand other species. Its goal is not to catch poachers but to penetrate transnational smuggling networks that, by some estimates, bring in more than a hundred billion dollars a year.

At a table across the room, Andrea Crosta, ELI's founder, sat monitoring the action with Mark Davis, his director of intelligence. They watched as Billy stepped out for a smoke. "I always think, This is the time to leave your phone behind, because you could capture a great conversation," Crosta said. He glanced over and laughed: Harry and Tommy were mutely gorging themselves on bulgogi. "I have almost no emotions toward those people," he said. "They are in the business of death, and I do dislike them for that, but it would be counterproductive to hate."

A fifty-four-year-old Italian with pale-blue eyes and a wistful air, Crosta shares a one-bedroom apartment in Marina del Rey with his rescue dog, Argos. Like many animal lovers, he is frequently disappointed by humans. "Andrea is one of my favorite people," Jane Goodall told me. "He's passionate, he's courageous—what he's doing is very dangerous—he loves dogs, and he won't ever, ever give up." Preoccupied with his next counterstrike, Crosta often goes all day without eating, then, as night falls, finds himself eying the ground mackerel in Argos's bowl.

ELI's annual budget is just three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, but its operations have led to the arrest of an alleged jaguar-fang ring in Bolivia; helped the Mexican government pursue the Cartel of the Sea, a network in Baja California that trafficked sea cucumbers and totoaba; and sparked at least seven ongoing investigations by the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Homeland Security, and the F.B.I. These agencies now treat ELI as trusted colleagues. Chris Egner, the Homeland Security agent who works most closely with Crosta's team, told me, "Our partnership with ELI is invaluable. Their access to these particular criminal networks is simply something we can't do."

After lunch, Crosta and Davis drove to a nearby boba shop and waited outside to debrief Billy. A boyish Jack-of-all-trades, Billy speaks Cantonese, Mandarin, several Chinese dialects, English, and a bit of Spanish and French, and has worked undercover on five continents. He has a knack for seeming rich, venal, and slightly dense—the perfect customer. He bounced up the sidewalk and began his report: "It's going great! They were a little cautious at the beginning. They asked, 'Where is the boss?'" Billy's boss had been played by Larry, another undercover, but Larry was travelling that week. "I said, 'Oh, he got COVID.'"

"Nice!" Mark Davis said, admiring the improv and offering a second take: "*Oh, he's dead.*" Davis retired from the F.B.I. in 2016, after thirty years as the agency's preëminent undercover agent. He played some two hundred roles and ingratiated himself with drug cartels led by Pablo Escobar and by El Chapo. Wiry, with a white mustache and soul patch and earring holes from past performances, Davis has a surf-bum vibe that's as disarming as it is misleading. He works for ELI without pay.

Once Harry and Tommy loosened up, Billy said, they described a variety of schemes carried out by their associates, including importing sea cucumbers to San Diego and manufacturing counterfeit Gucci bags. They also elaborated on the way they smuggled Chinese nationals into the U.S., via Macau and Ecuador. "They use fake Japanese residence cards that get the people into Mexico City, then bribe customs to get them on local flights to Tijuana," Billy said. "Then the cartel brings them over the border by a mountain road." Tommy had admitted that the journey had its hazards: "Sometimes the cartel would take your cash, and there are some crazy things happening. But normally no rape."

Crosta knew that these details would interest Homeland Security, a vital consideration for ELI. Broadly speaking, law-enforcement agencies care less about animals than about "convergence"—the other crimes that wildlife traffickers commit. The bootleggers from the Golden Triangle who smuggle pangolins and bears into China also smuggle opium and methamphetamines; the group that brings



Andrea Crosta oversees an operation in Costa Rica. "To save the animals, we have to grow larger than we are," he says.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUAN BRENNER

monkeys to Europe from northern Morocco also conveys hash, counterfeit goods, and people. Crosta aims to harness the agencies' agenda to his own. "You won't scare people if you arrest them for wildlife trafficking," he said at the restaurant. "You have to charge them with human smuggling and money laundering and put them away for twenty years."

Davis added, "I don't care if these motherfuckers start dealing cocaine instead—we just want to get them off of trading on Mother Earth."

The problem for ELI is that, while most people treat nature as an inexhaustible resource, the traffickers know better. Billy reported that Harry had said, "Seafood, I'm not doing right now, because it's not sustainable." Davis laughed, and Crosta said, "Of course, of course"—his habitual response to ecological destruction caused by human greed. "I hear this all the time," Billy said. "They all say there's less and less rhino horns and shark fins, so we have to grab all we can before it's finished."

Reports of wildlife trafficking often have a "weird news" aspect: the passenger stopped at the Amsterdam airport with hummingbirds in his underwear; the travellers from Guyana who arrive at J.F.K. carrying dozens of hair curlers, each containing a chestnut-bellied seed finch. (The finches are destined for singing competitions in the Guyanese community in Queens, where a particularly melodious one can sell for more than ten thousand dollars.)

The oddity of these stories obscures a pernicious effect of globalization: a scrambling of the world's wildlife map. South American butterflies arrive in the U.S. after being routed through Thailand; Mexican cartels sell tiger cubs. In this business, animals are overnighted, alive or dead, to wherever they're worth the most. Nils Gilman, a globalization expert at the Berggruen Institute, told me, "Where price difference is based on differences of moral opinion, the likelihood of enduring profit margins is very high." At times, rhino horn has been worth more than gold—so South African rhinos are often killed with Czech-made rifles sold by Portuguese arms dealers to poachers from Mozambique, who send the horns by courier to Qatar or Vietnam, or have them bundled with elephant ivory in Maputo or Mombasa or Lagos or Luanda and delivered to China via Malaysia or Hong Kong.

Social media is a powerful market facilitator and accelerant. A 2020 study of Facebook found four hundred and seventy-three pages that openly traded wildlife and another two hundred and eighty-one groups that participated in the global bazaar. The code words were transparent: "ox bone" for elephant ivory, "striped T-shirt" for tiger skin. Gretchen Peters, the head of the Alliance to Counter Crime Online, which performed the study, told me, "Everything from tarantulas to cheetahs and elephants go into population collapse once they start trending."

As many as a million plant and animal species are expected to vanish by 2050. Ninety-three per cent of the world's fish stocks are fully or excessively exploited. On land, humans now constitute thirty-six per cent of the vertebrate population, and livestock fifty-nine per cent; all the other terrestrial animals account for just five per cent. The erasure begins whenever a road is carved into a virgin forest. Logging, mining, and palm-oil plantations or cattle ranches rapidly follow, along with poaching and trafficking. After a logging company built a road in Congo, wildlife populations in the surrounding forest declined more than twenty-five per cent in just three weeks.

The chief weapon against wildlife trafficking is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species



of Wild Fauna and Flora. CITES, propounded in 1973, has been signed by nearly all the world's countries, and governs how more than forty thousand species move about the globe. But the agreement, designed to expedite trade rather than suppress it, is in many ways impracticable. Elephant trophies with tusks can be traded, but elephant ivory can't; in the CITES database, customs officers must identify a species by its Latin name before they can take action. Most significantly, CITES lacks an enforcement mechanism, and it doesn't mandate what to do with confiscated animals, which are often euthanized. John Scanlon, who served as the secretary-general of CITES from 2010 to 2018, told me, "It's completely obvious there's no way to tackle transnational organized crime using a fifty-year-old trade agreement."

Trafficking has global consequences. When species are removed from an environment, carbon sequestration and pollination decline, fires and floods are less contained, and animal-borne diseases such as bird flu and H.I.V. arise and spread. Yet there is no global will to supplant CITES. "Because the word 'wildlife' is in wildlife crime, governments don't take it seriously," Mary Rice, the executive director of the Environmental Investigation Agency U.K., an influential conservation group, said. "They think of cuddly little animals. They don't see it through the lens of a criminal act that involves conspiracy and bribery and corruption and sometimes murder." The world spends a hundred billion dollars a year to stop drug trafficking, and far less than a billion to stop wildlife trafficking. For the most part, the tools used to pursue drug runners—wiretaps, undercover informants—are unknown in combatting wildlife offenses. A top U.N. environmental-crimes official told me that in one Nordic country "the environmental officers were known as the Snake Squad—two agents at the end of their careers relegated to a back office."

The United States is often looked to as the globe's animal cop. The Lacey Act, in concert with other federal statutes, dictates that if any part of an illicit wildlife transaction touches American territory—even if a payment merely passes through a server in the U.S.—federal agencies can step in. Yet, while Homeland Security receives nine hundred and fifty billion dollars in annual funding, its Wildlife and Environmental Crimes Unit, which launches this year, will get just $7.5 million of that. Fish and Wildlife's Office of Law Enforcement has a budget of ninety-four million dollars, but even that is inadequate to dent the global trade. When I spent a day with its officers at J.F.K., Paul Chapelle, the agent in charge of the New York District, told me, "We are absolutely beyond capacity." There were three inspectors at

the airport, who were expected to screen four hundred tons of mail, four thousand tons of cargo, and well over a hundred thousand passengers.

The inspectors are tasked with thwarting a primal need. We find wild animals more beautiful, more exotic, healthier, tastier, and more efficacious than domestic ones. Around the world, they are used as medicine, as subjects for lab experiments, as props for selfies, as pets, as food, for their furs and skins, for breeding purposes, and for sport hunting. Even childish wonder is implicated in this compendious scavenging; the trade in owls soared after "Harry Potter." What unites these uses is a desire for animals' atavism, for their astonishing strangeness. We project onto them all the wild qualities that we have lost, and that we long either to reclaim or to destroy.



UNSETTLING CABIN IN THE WOODS

The infinity pool glimmered in the October twilight above the Los Angeles Basin. Jim Demetriades, an entrepreneur and an environmentalist, was hosting a fund-raiser for Earth League International at his Tuscan-style mansion in Beverly Hills—a place called Villa Theos, Greco-Roman for "God's Country House." Eighty beautifully dressed people milled on the lawn, among them the director Oliver Stone and the actress Rebecca De Mornay. Crosta found himself hoping that he might raise his entire pie-in-the-sky budget of five hundred thousand dollars that night.

There were pitfalls to evade. The Demetriades family and their set were Republicans and hunters, so Crosta had pushed to insure that their chef's hors d'œuvres wouldn't repulse vegans. Then Demetriades mentioned in his introductory remarks that his daughter was on ELI's board, even though her inclusion hadn't passed the discussion stage. Crosta kept quiet: *Maybe we* should *make her a board member, so she and Jim will support us.*

He'd told me, "Our biggest challenge isn't going undercover—it's fund-raising. I hate it, I suck at it." Crosta had been to galas that raised millions with emotional appeals, but he found that approach distasteful. He told me, "I pitched a big donor once and he said, 'Don't you have something nicer I can do with my son, like adopt an orphaned baby elephant?' In L.A., they're obsessed with adopting three, five, ten orphaned baby elephants. I said, 'I am in the business of producing *less* orphaned baby elephants.' We didn't get any money."

"Adopting" baby elephants is a staple tactic of conservation N.G.O.s—a way to attract funding for less charismatic wildlife. Rikkert Reijnen, an adviser to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), explained, "Elephants require space, and you can protect a lot of animals within that space. The most important animal in that system is actually the termite." Termites recycle deadwood and leaves and aerate the soil; without them, there would be no plants for animals to feed on. "But termites make a very unappealing poster child."

Crosta, truckling as much as he could bear to, had blazoned a photo of a mother elephant and her baby across the event's posters. And he began his presentation by recalling his earlier days as a security consultant who occasionally trained park rangers: "My story begins twelve years ago in Kenya, in the middle of the elephant-poaching crisis, when we were losing up to fifty thousand elephants a year. I was going out with the rangers, and one day I saw one of the most horrific scenes of my life—an entire group of elephants that had been gunned down with AK-47s, just for the ivory. There was only one survivor, a little elephant later called Zambezi, hacked on the spine. He was probably trying to protect his mother. What I remember is the faces of the rangers." He gestured, evoking helplessness. "The day after, they actually caught two of the people involved, and you can't imagine two people more poor and desperate and dirty, making a few bucks for every kilo of ivory, where the traffickers were making thousands."

As Crosta clicked through images of a rhino-horn trafficker in Vietnam, orphaned orangutans in Thailand, and illegal timber in Gabon, he explained how ELI works: "We put together a team of former F.B.I. and former C.I.A. undercover operators to infiltrate the most important wildlife-trafficking groups in the world. Twelve undercovers of different nationalities, and their work is to identify these people and become their friend. We never buy anything illegal, we are not armed—we are just really good at becoming your friend." This overview was somewhat misleading: though ELI has used operatives from Taiwan, South Africa, and Colombia, it typically fields just two or three undercovers at a time, and none of them are former agency members. (One ex-C.I.A. operative has said he'd join up once Crosta could afford him.) And ELI does sometimes participate in buys on behalf of law enforcement: in 2021, at the request of federal agents, Billy and Larry spent hours in a U-Haul parked outside a McDonald's

in San Diego, negotiating the purchase of totoaba bladders from a trafficker.

Crosta's fibs and elisions derived in part from sheepishness—"I'm almost ashamed to say how small we are"—and in part from a need to protect his team. During the U-Haul buy, the trafficker brought along a countersurveillance squad from a drug cartel. Crosta told me, "We did a ton of work for that buy, but we can't take any public credit, because the cartel is a danger to us."

At Villa Theos, Rebecca De Mornay told Demetriades, "It's thrilling! It's so important it should be a movie." He nodded vigorously: "This is NASA—it's the future!" But many in the crowd remained unconvinced by Crosta's approach. Two guests suggested to ELI team members that, instead of empathizing with poachers, they should go to Africa and kill them.

Donors like direct action, and they like feeling that their donation is fixing the problem. So N.G.O.s display photos of rescued animals and skim over measurable outcomes. Jane Goodall told me, "Facts, facts, facts—people don't care." In Crosta's situation, she said, "I'd show video of someone pulling a scale off a live pangolin. Then I'd jump to footage of a big, fat, complacent kingpin eating pangolin flesh and tiger bones—make the people watching hate, because there's no end to the lengths that people will go to get their beastly way. And then I'd show a pangolin recovering in a sanctuary. You must end on a positive note."

As the benefit wound down, Demetriades invited the Earth League team and a dozen other lingerers to his underground bunker, which contained a wine cellar, a bowling alley, a disco, and a shooting range. Hunting guns gleamed on the walls. Demetriades brought out Cuban cigars from a humidor and poured 2005 Château Smith Haut Lafitte. For some, the night got a little woozy. When everyone emerged, an hour or two later, the technician who'd wired Crosta's A.V. system limped up the driveway, having just been bitten by one of Demetriades's dogs. (Demetriades denies this.) When the partygoers shone their phone lights on the technician's shin and exclaimed at the blood, someone offered to shoot the dog. "It's time to go," Crosta muttered. "It's really time to go now."

By Crosta's calculus, ELI could shut down trafficking in much of the world with an endowment of ten million dollars. The event had raised eleven thousand five hundred dollars. Driving home, he kept shaking his head. "This is why I hate hope," he said. "Hope is just a commodity, selling you beautiful words and pictures. People at these fund-raisers want to enjoy themselves, to forget, maybe because they feel guilty that they haven't done enough for Earth." Wealthy donors, he said, are "like the little puppy that is focussed on a flower—and then a butterfly goes by, and they follow that."

In November, a Cambodian man named Masphal Kry was arrested at J.F.K., for his role in allegedly trafficking two thousand six hundred and thirty-four long-tailed macaques to U.S. pharma companies, to be used as test subjects. Kry was the deputy director of his country's Department of Wildlife and Biodiversity, on his way to a CITES conference in Panama; his boss was also indicted. Many of those charged with protecting their country's resources end up exploiting them. Malaysia's former minister of planning and resource management enabled the destruction of the Sarawak rain forest. Burundi's ivory stockpile was repeatedly plundered, despite being stored at a military compound.

Because so many countries facilitate wildlife crime, N.G.O.s have tried to fill the enforcement void. For decades, they underwrote military-style training of rangers across Africa, an approach known as "fortress conservation." When the paleontologist Richard Leakey was appointed to run Kenya's wildlife service, in 1989, he instituted a policy of shooting poachers on sight, which soon spread through the continent's parks and beyond. At one preserve in India, the rule was simply "Kill the unwanted."

Poachers, too, could be indiscriminate. They sometimes killed elephants using oranges spiked with strychnine or pesticides—which had the additional effect of killing vultures, whose circling might otherwise alert wardens to a dead elephant. But the policy of vigilante justice eventually inspired moral revulsion. "Many N.G.O.s aren't comfortable anymore with 'shoot to kill' policies, with funding a paramilitary institution," Brighton Kumchedwa, Malawi's director of parks and wildlife, told me. Fortress conservation also proved to be inescapably neocolonial: creating Africa's parks entailed the forcible removal of the Maasai and Wameru people, among many others.

From 2015 to 2017, Damien Mander, a former commando from Australia, helped wage what he calls a "ground-level offensive against the local population" to stop poaching in South Africa's



"It's called 'muscle confusion.' First, I put on workout clothes, then I confuse my muscles by not working out."

Kruger National Park. "We had one hundred and sixty-five personnel, helicopters, drones, canine attack teams," he told me. "We were essentially an occupying force." Realizing that the result was at best a Pyrrhic victory, he started a program that deploys female rangers in four African countries. "You have zero corruption with women, they naturally de-escalate situations, and they bring more money back to their communities, so the communities buy in," Mander said. "You're on a continent that's going to have two billion people by 2040—sustained conflict with the local population is not the way to go." Ultimately, fortress conservation is predicated on a landscape devoid of people.

The biggest problem with fortress conservation, though, is that it doesn't work. "Every rhino has its own security detail," Rikkert Reijnen, of IFAW, said, exaggerating only slightly—the last two northern white rhinos live under twenty-four-hour protection in Kenya. "And still they're getting poached."

As a teen-ager, in Milan, Andrea Crosta used earplugs to sleep, because his bedroom was so noisy. It housed an African gray parrot; softshell and red-eared turtles; an aquarium filled with angelfish, tetras, guppies, barbs, and a red-tailed shark; a python; and his cat, Goccia. "I got more happiness from the animals than from my human interactions," he told me. His parents got divorced when he was seven. "I think that day destroyed my ability to trust, or to want to have children," he said. "Not to mention that my mother later killed herself with gas in the car—that she left me doubly. I still wonder, What if I had been watching TV the day they told me about the divorce, like my brother"—Nicola was eighteen months younger—"and he had been the one they told? Because he is married twenty years now, and has three children."

While Crosta was at the University of Milan, studying zoology, he worked at an endangered-species breeding center. He hoped to continue there after graduating, but the center couldn't pay him. So he served a stint as a military policeman, worked in crisis P.R., and then started an online-shopping company called Think Italy, which was briefly worth eight million euros, until the dot-com crash of 2000. Still restless, he became a security consultant. The work, which entailed collaborating with Italy's antiterrorism police unit and with entrepreneurs who'd come out of Israel's élite cyber squad, versed him in a variety of threats.

In 2011, when he was in Kenya, advising a security team for the former Somali Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi, Crosta came upon the group of elephants slaughtered with AK-47s. He knew that in different circumstances he'd have committed the same crime: "Of course I'd be a poacher, if shooting one elephant got me four years of salary to feed my family. If I offered people here in L.A. four years of salary, they'd bring me their mother."

He and an Israeli colleague, Nir Kalron, began raising money to train rangers. But Crosta grew increasingly aware that poaching was inseparable from financial and political networks that extended around the globe. The U.S. intelligence community had already begun to understand wildlife trafficking as both a cause and an effect of instability. Rod Schoonover, a State Department analyst at that time, told me, "Biodiversity loss started to become a concern in national security. It has security consequences—water stress, food stress, civil unrest, deep corruption."

Working for Gedi, Crosta and Kalron had heard that Al-Shabaab, the terrorist organization that controlled much of Somalia, was exporting ivory to China. They investigated, somewhat clumsily—their surreptitious videos often showcased an orange-juice glass or a hotel-room curtain—and spoke with a dozen sources. In 2013, they completed a study that said Al-Shabaab was trafficking up to three tons of ivory a month.

They launched an N.G.O. called Elephant Action League, and posted a summary of the study on their Web site, but no one picked it up. Then Al-Shabaab attacked the Westgate mall in Nairobi, leaving seventy-one people dead. Crosta tweeted, "Elephant poaching helped fund Kenya attack," and the *Times* and other papers mentioned E.A.L.'s findings. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that there was growing evidence that Al-Shabaab "fund their terrorist activities to a great extent from ivory trafficking."

The international outcry about the attack contributed to China's decision, in 2017, to ban ivory entirely. Yet Crosta and Kalron's study angered some conservation N.G.O.s, which believed that they'd embellished their data. Rosaleen Duffy, a political ecologist, argued in a paper written with colleagues that the study was "poorly evidenced" and "based on false assumptions." She also claimed that it advanced the U.S.'s global agenda, by making wildlife preservation a mere by-product of mitigating security risks.

Crosta said, "There was a camp that saw terrorists everywhere, and a camp that saw them nowhere, and we were in the middle with our little study." He later published a full report elaborating their findings: "The mistake we made in the original was not to contextualize ivory trafficking as just *part* of the way Al-Shabaab funded itself. They were also involved in kidnapping, piracy, and charcoal." He added, "I got a ton of shit for our original study. But it resonated all the way to China, so I'm happy, because it helped the elephants."

Once Crosta grasped the implications of Al-Shabaab's funding, he decided that he needed to figure out how to trace webs of traffickers. He launched WildLeaks, a site where people could anonymously report trafficking, and eventually recast Elephant Action League as Earth League International. In 2017, he got a tip that informants in South Africa had a trove of intelligence. He flew to Johannesburg and drove to meet with three men at an abandoned ranch near the Botswana border. Two worked in security; the third was an ex-cop. South Africa's wildlife was a notorious global buffet: for years, Vietnamese and Lao rings flew in Thai prostitutes and registered them as "rhino hunters" for a CITES-approved "trophy" cull. (Czech riflemen were imported to do the actual killing.) Yet Crosta was stunned by what he was shown. "They had *incredible* information on rhino-horn trafficking," he said. "There were Chinese Embassy links, North Korean Embassy links, links to terrorist groups in Zambia and Mozambique, hundreds of people in the government on the payroll, including a top South African leader and his son. We were *walking on* their crime map, it was so big."

The informants had details on twenty networks, and an unsentimental plan for smashing them: "They wanted a hundred thousand dollars per network to go

apprehend the leaders, or kill them if necessary, and millions more to fly a helicopter to Mozambique to take down a big trafficker." Crosta had neither the funds nor the murderous inclination to fall in. But, he said, "it was a pivotal moment. I realized there are three hundred environmental organizations just in South Africa that do advocacy, awareness, social media, work with local communities—but what the world needed was a real agency to fight these guys. Because we were like Boy Scouts going up against Escobar."

TO ASTRAEUS

Pale blue, the split days pure radium,
bittersweet lace in the snow-white field,
the red seeds ladybirds, gold husks papyrus,
the fine print reading, *fly away home*.

But we are home. Morose, angelic,
your dirigibles flap their glassine wings
above the pond, the ice boat's matchbox
traps ignite their peacock halos. Our smoky

offerings provoke, not please—even
the green-gold coverlet, its diamond
panes unstitched, shifts from us off the bed.
Live here with me? Twilight's innamorati

smudge the lawn. From the ceiling you
look down, holding Eros' dumbstruck thunderbolt.

—*Cynthia Zarin*

As Tom Toth, a Fish and Wildlife inspector, showed me the international-mail facility at J.F.K., he strode past bins of parcels headed to South America and Europe and planted himself by one marked "China." "I look at China and Hong Kong and try to check every package going out," he said. Paul Chapelle, the senior agent, stepped in to add, diplomatically, "We look at all of Asia, really."

Blaming one country or region for wildlife trafficking is a ticklish matter. "Everyone is sensitive, because the issue gets framed as 'the West against China,'" Rikkert Reijnen said. "But almost every investigation you do around the world quickly leads to Chinese interests." Many of Crosta's tactical, strategic, and ontological worries are about Chinese traffickers and buyers. "They are eating the planet alive," he told me. "They have this Pantagruelic appetite for everything."

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has forged links to a hundred and forty-nine countries, spending more than a trillion dollars to develop roads and bridges and ports and to help poorer nations open up their natural resources. The effect is an open flow of commerce, both licit and illicit. A Chinese trafficker in Peru told an ELI operative that Embassy officials would gauge the demand from China: "Who or which company needs seafoods? Who needs a very rare treasure or specialty?"

China is by far the leading destination for illegal wildlife: between 2009 and 2021, there were at least seven hundred and fifty airport seizures of products headed for China; the next-largest offender, Vietnam, had a hundred and thirty-five, and the U.S. ninety-four. A primary driver is traditional Chinese medicine. China is expanding T.C.M. around the globe, particularly in Africa—planning, according to its State Council, to make it a four-hundred-and-twenty-billion-dollar industry. Although most T.C.M. ingredients are botanical, the pharmacopoeia includes products from seventy animal species. Rhino horn, now banned, was long held to cure impotence, and pangolin scales are used to treat rheumatism and to improve lactation. The curative mechanism is obscure, as both rhino horn and pangolin scales are composed of keratin, the material in our fingernails. Still, a hundred thousand pangolins a year are killed for their meat and their scales; the four Asian species have been hunted nearly to extinction, and the four African species are next.

Demand is created by ever-shifting narratives. For decades, rhino horn went chiefly to Yemen, to make dagger handles. In 2007, only thirteen rhinos were poached in South Africa, which contains most of the world's population. Then a story arose in Vietnam that a politician had been cured of cancer by ingesting horn. (Some conservationists believe that this tale was created by the politician himself, who then began trafficking in horn.) In the next seven years, the number of rhinos poached in South Africa shot up ninety-two hundred per cent. More recently, clubgoers in Southeast Asia have been snorting powdered rhino horn like cocaine.

An ecological counternarrative has emerged in China. The government has curtailed the sale of illegal species on social media, and a court recently convicted seventeen people in the Chen organized-crime family of smuggling more than twenty tons of ivory. The two ringleaders were sentenced to life in prison and forfeiture of all their personal assets. But the crackdown has been spotty. "China has prosecuted loads of wildlife cases—many more than any other Asian country," Scott Roberton, the executive director for countertrafficking at the Wildlife Conservation Society, told me. "And it's still not nearly enough."

The struggle between the country's factions leads to ambivalent policy. In 2016, China modernized its wildlife-protection law, rolling back language declaring that animals existed for humans' use and benefit—but similar language was recently restored to the law. The registry of T.C.M. ingredients has stopped listing pangolin scales as a stand-alone cure, yet it still endorses them as an ingredient in many patent medicines. After COVID-19 emerged, officials temporarily banned the sale of wild animals at wet markets, but other officials promoted bear bile as a cure for the virus.

N.G.O.s with offices in China risk

getting kicked out if they confront the government about such contradictions. The director of one such office told me, "If we say, 'We need to reduce demand for these products among the Chinese people,' officials will say, 'Why do you always mention demand? It suggests that China's economic development is linked to illegal behavior!' So we've learned to say, 'How can we *increase public awareness of this issue*?' The Chinese personality is that we hope to hear good things, and only then will we encourage ourselves to do better."

As Crosta started working with Mark Davis, in 2016, he assessed what other N.G.O.s were doing. Fortress conservation was proving insufficient, but no one had another comprehensive approach. Several organizations were working to "build capacity" in resource-rich countries. The Basel Institute on Governance collaborates with state agencies in places such as Peru, Uganda, and Malawi to help them strengthen their protocols. Juhani Grossmann, who heads Basel's green-corruption program, told me, "If the risk to the government official for issuing a fake permit increases, the size of the bribe increases, and the profit margin goes down. That's what I hope, anyway."

Investigating traffickers was another matter. Their tradecraft is routinely negligent, since they often don't view their crimes as serious. One prominent Vietnamese trafficker in ivory and rhino horn used the same phone number for years; so did one of Africa's biggest ivory traffickers. Yet their pursuers were often equally slipshod. Among researchers, a few weeks on the ground in Zambia could distinguish you as an expert. A former law-enforcement official who's worked with environmental N.G.O.s told me, "I've seen counter-wildlife-trafficking operations where people did 'bottom-up' training by watching 'C.S.I.' and 'Narcos.'"

People defending the environment were killed in at least sixty-four countries between 2015 and 2019. Even skilled operatives run grave risks. Wayne Lotter, who helped lead the PAMS Foundation, an N.G.O. that was instrumental in jailing Tanzania's so-called Ivory Queen, was ambushed in a taxi in 2017 by assassins who fled with his laptop. Eleven people were sentenced to death for the murder, but it is not clear that the ringleaders were among them. Lotter's co-founder, Krissie Clark, who was in the taxi with him, told me, "We're all still trying to figure out which button we pushed without meaning to."

Crosta, trying to design a more effective organization, was impressed by Ofir Drori, of an African N.G.O. called EAGLE. Drori, who has a piratical air, has had more than three thousand traffickers arrested, including Guinea's former top CITES official. (The official was convicted but given a Presidential pardon.) He explained to me that, once he had evidence against a trafficker, he'd meet with the relevant minister: "I'd say, 'I need you to lend me your police force. And I'm not going to tell you, or them, who the trafficker is until we're at the house.' We're working more from a place of force than of relationship." Crosta worried, though, that many of Drori's targets were henchmen: "Ofir was working his ass off during the worst years of elephant poaching, arresting tons of people, and the problem got worse and worse."

Crosta planned to identify the higher-ups, and to amass information on them until his dossiers compelled prosecutions. But collaborating with other nonprofits was difficult; most treated insight as a precious resource. Rob Parry-Jones, who runs the wildlife-crime initiative at W.W.F. International, told me, "N.G.O.s don't want to share information about



trafficking—for security reasons, but also because they lose their competitive advantage, their ability to tell a donor, 'Only we understand this.'"

As Crosta investigated, his goal was to be patient, professional, and invisible. A host country shouldn't even know that ELI is there. Billy doesn't stay at the hotel where he meets his targets (so that they can't bribe the desk clerk to examine his passport), and the team communicates with him through encrypted apps. Computers are air-gapped, and Crosta maintains his schedule on an unhackable medium: a paper desk calendar.

Many of Billy's interactions in a new country begin as "cold bumps"—seemingly accidental run-ins. After he befriends a target, "if we have some chemistry, I say, 'Oh, do you have sea cucumber?'" he told me. It helps that he sympathizes with traffickers, up to a point. "Some have lovely characters—loyal, generous, brave, a good sense of humor," he said. "They came to Africa with their parents, let's say, and learned Swahili and English and all the details of the shipping industry, even if they didn't finish middle school. Commendable! But they were predestined for this terrible business by their parents, who were doing it, too."

Billy's elastic résumé enables him to explore almost any opportunity: *My rich boss/uncle in Hong Kong/Taipei/Singapore has a bunch of brothers who are into timber/wildlife/money laundering/whatever.* To build credibility, he deploys tiger-bone stories and pangolin photos borrowed from traffickers in other countries: "Then the guys feel comfortable and vouch for me with their friends." Gradually, in the course of months and years, he glad-hands his way toward the kingpins.

Last year, Billy started visiting Costa Rica, and by assiduous work in restaurants and barbershops he identified nine "persons of interest." Costa Rica wasn't an obvious target for ELI. It has perhaps the best-run government in Central America, and has called for the U.N. to add a wildlife-trading protocol to its bans on trafficking humans and guns. But there was reason to believe that locals were exporting significant quantities of shark fins. Although Costa Rica reported only one seizure in the past decade, a biologist who works with ELI had pored over shipping documents and determined that Costa Rican shark fins were entering Hong Kong at as much as ten times the officially recognized rate.

ELI had received a hundred thousand dollars from a two-year grant limited to Costa Rica. (Crosta's global agenda, to his dismay, must often be pursued one country or species at a time.) For investigators, Latin America poses particular challenges. Crawford Allan,

the senior director for wildlife crime at W.W.F. U.S., told me, "In Africa, the elephant crisis was obvious—you have enormous animals with their faces hacked off and someone packing a container full of ivory. In Latin America, it's much more hidden. It's someone taking a boat to a remote place in the jungle three times a week."

Earlier this year, Crosta and Davis and their crime analyst, Chiara Talerico, a fiercely bright Italian, were finishing a lunch of fried rice in San José, the Costa Rican capital, when Billy texted from next door. He was done talking with Mr. Lin, a stalwart in the local black market, and was going "across the street" to a seafood shop to discuss exporting fins. The team traipsed around the city's Chinatown for fifteen minutes, looking for a "big red sign" that Billy had said marked the shop. It turned out to be four blocks up and around the corner. "Across the street, my ass!" Crosta grumbled.

After Billy emerged, the team reconvened in the lobby of a Marriott, next to a "Please Do Not Feed the Coatis" sign. "So," Billy said, "the woman at the seafood store said some of their dried shark fins come from Puntarenas"—a city on the coast—"and some actually come from the U.S."

"That's super strange," Crosta said.

Billy shrugged: *It's all super strange.* The global slaughter of sharks is enormous—humans kill a hundred million a year—and particularly short-sighted. Sharks regulate the environment in two crucial ways: they help maintain populations of phytoplankton (which produce half the oxygen we breathe) by eating their predators, and they help maintain the ocean as the world's greatest carbon sink by scavenging animals that remove carbon from the air. Many of the sharks that we kill are unwanted bycatch, but we also use their teeth as jewelry, their meat for pet food, their cartilage and liver oil as moisturizers in sunscreen and lipstick, and their fins for soup.

As a tropical rain drummed on the hotel roof, Billy started to sketch a web of buyers and contacts. There was Mr. Lin: "short, chubby guy who wears crazy clothes." On his phone, he scrolled to a photo of Lin, who wore a gold-brocaded jacket worthy of a Gilbert and Sullivan admiral. There was Diego, a local businessman who had introduced Billy to a trafficker named Pascal, and who had also promised to connect him with Mario, a legendary shark-fin exporter.

Talerico, who'd been scowling at her laptop, said, "O.K., I found Diego's Skype and WhatsApp info! Let's put him here on my map—that makes it nicer. Is he a, let's say, client provider for Mario?"

"Diego is not in the business," Billy said, "but he would like a commission."

"I'd love to do a network analysis," she went on, "but we need at least three people to make a network." Once Talerico has identified the rudiments of a network, she runs visualization software on the traffickers' phone records to home in on the group's "secret keeper," or key middleman. Then she runs an eigenvector-centrality algorithm to reveal the ultimate boss—often the person who connects to the secret keeper and no one else.

It's nebulous, inferential work. A trafficking network is almost never the hierarchical "link chart" outlined in yarn on cop shows. A forensic scientist named Sam Wasser, who consults with Homeland Security, performed a DNA analysis on forty-nine ivory shipments seized in Africa between 2002 and 2019. By collating genetic matches between tusks and correlating those results with phone records and bills of lading, Wasser came to believe that no more than four transnational criminal groups were shipping the majority of the ivory out of Africa. Still, he told me, "over and over again, you think you've got the kingpin, and then you see ivory moving out that has all the same hallmarks and points of connection."

That night in San José, Billy went out to dinner with Pascal; the ELI team sat at a table ten yards away. Talerico glanced over and murmured, "Pascal brought his family." His parents were tonging shrimp and corn from a hot pot. "So the dinner may be good for bonding, but terrible for information." Crosta shook his head: "Pascal will talk business."

Afterward, Billy said that Pascal, undeterred by his parents' presence, had chatted freely about a slew of "dodgy transactions," including smuggling in mercury used in wildcat mines to separate gold from other minerals. "And he told me that there were a couple of secret gold mines in southern Costa Rica, near the Panamanian border. Maybe next time I can be introduced to the gold guy."

Crosta's methodology has worked strikingly well—at least, as far as the investigations go. In 2021, after two years in Bolivia, ELI had intricate knowledge of a jaguar-fang-trafficking network there; the teeth, bought from poachers for twenty-two dollars apiece, were being sold for nine hundred dollars in China and Vietnam, where they were often labelled as tiger fangs. Pauline Verheij, a Dutch researcher, had written a thoughtful trafficking report on Bolivia and Suriname in 2019, based on open-source research and interviews with local law enforcement. But she told me that ELI's techniques revealed "much more detailed information about these networks' modus operandi."

Crosta shared his information with a prosecutor named Moisés Palma Salazar, who runs Bolivia's environmental-crime office. The police raided six properties, detained four Chinese nationals, and recovered sixteen reptile belts and four jaguar fangs. But there was a leak: a few months later, as a new investigation began, a WeChat message to the trafficking community warned everyone to take cover. When Billy returned that year, a hit man whom he met at a party told him about other texts detailing exactly what the police were looking for. Billy told me, "Luckily, it was my fourth or fifth time in Bolivia. If it had been my first time, they would have suspected me."

For a while, the network behaved as Crosta had hoped: traffickers told Billy that it was no longer safe to sell. But business soon resumed. Palma told me that, even if he wins convictions, the defendants face sentences of at most seven years, and probably nowhere near that. The Bolivian police force, which included only about fifty environmental cops, had no Chinese speakers and was generally overmatched. "Only ELI was able to get close to these networks," he said.

ELI had similarly mixed luck in Mexico. In 2018, it began sharing information with the Mexican government about the Cartel of the Sea. But a prosecutor who worked on the matter admitted to me that the sea-cucumber case against the cartel had stalled. In the related totoaba cases, a Chinese national was

arrested but not prosecuted, and the first Mexican to go on trial was acquitted.

Crosta and Davis had spent considerable time in Baja, and ELI had produced a painstaking report about the trade in bladders and its effect on the vaquita porpoises, which get snared in fishermen's mile-long gill nets. The population had declined from five hundred and sixty-seven in 1997 to about eight. Yet not only were the traffickers going unpunished but the vaquita's story was being commandeered. Sea Shepherd, an N.G.O. that had stationed surveillance boats in the Upper Gulf of California since 2015, claimed in a fund-raising e-mail last summer that its work was having a "measurable, positive impact on the vaquita"—a narrative not of demise but of resilience.

The longer the vaquita is perceived to be thriving, the more money N.G.O.s can raise off it. But Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, a marine biologist who has long overseen the Mexican government's efforts to save the porpoises, told me that local incentives run the other way. "Some authorities are betting the vaquita will go extinct, and maybe they even want it to," he said. "As long as the vaquita is around, the fishermen are mad at the government for forbidding them to fish, and the government faces international pressure and sanctions. The saying we have is 'Once the dog is dead, the rabies is gone.'"

Time was running out. "I had a dream about the last vaquita," Crosta told me. "I was at sea on a boat, and I saw a little head popping up outside the water, and he was calling to the others—they're very social—but no one was answering. And I was *so sad*. It would be the first CITES-protected species that goes extinct, an epic failure of conservation." He laughed, abruptly. "I'm always saying, 'Epic failure of conservation.'"

After these experiences, Crosta said, he realized, "We can't continue with the Bolivian environmental police or the forest police of Ecuador—Jesus Christ!" Henceforth, he would bring his juiciest morsels only to American law enforcement. Ultimately, he hoped to establish "an intelligence agency for earth" modelled on the C.I.A. and its comprehensive reach. "I'd be a pariah in the N.G.O. community," he told me. "They'd say, 'What Andrea is doing raises questions of lack of transparency, corrupting local people as informants and putting them in danger, blah blah blah.' I'm very comfortable with all that, because right now the cost for traffickers to do what they do is zero."

Crosta's unstinting zeal has taken a toll. In 2014, he married Nirmala Fernandes, a Dutch model, but the marriage didn't last; he left for Los Angeles in 2018, and they began divorce proceedings. "The work Andrea did in that dark world left a shadow on him," Fernandes said. "I would be cooking dinner and I would hear these awful sounds as he watched a video of gorillas being tortured. Laughter and joy with his friends—all that faded. People think it would have saved our marriage if Andrea had worked less, but it would make him too miserable not to be doing all he can for the animals. I don't even think he'd like to be called a human anymore. More like a wolf."

Puntarenas, on Costa Rica's western coast, bears the impress of illicit globalization. Mexican and Colombian cartels transport cocaine through it, and, outside the area where cruise ships briefly dock, the houses have window bars, the wharves are gated, and strangers face lingering scrutiny. When the ELI team visited the port of Caldera, just south of Puntarenas, two ships were taking on containers—a gantry crane performing rapid, relentless work—and nine more waited in the bay. "This is the perfect small port for smuggling," Crosta said. "If you pay off one person there, you can do whatever you want."

Yet, for days, evidence to support Crosta's inferences had proved scant. Billy met with a prosperous local, Victoria, who'd hinted that she could sell him seahorses and sea dragons. But she'd been cagey. "I can learn more, but only after I place a little order with her and her husband," he told the team afterward, at a beach restaurant. A black spiny-tailed iguana basked on a nearby stack of concrete blocks, perfectly camouflaged.

"We were hoping Victoria could introduce you to someone bigger," Talerico said, frowning at her skeletal link chart.

"The big one would not introduce you to anyone, because they're the big one," Billy said.

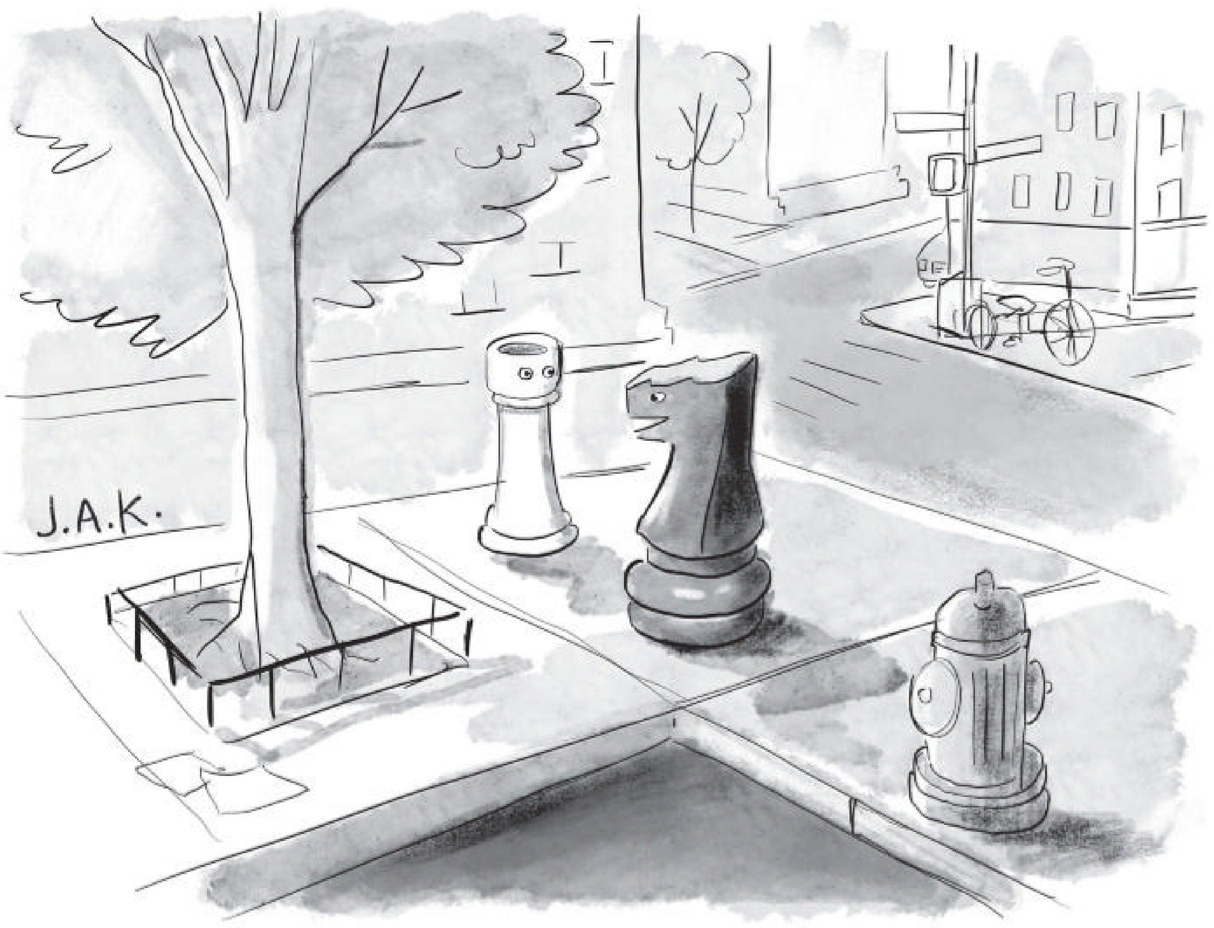
Two days later, Billy announced that he'd found a big one who was less wary. In the lobby of the team's hotel, he showed photos he'd taken of a mansion owned by a seafood exporter named Joshua. "Man, this guy's house is beautiful!" he said.

"Joshua is who, exactly?" Talerico said, crossly. "I really need you to start at the beginning."

Billy launched into a detailed narrative: he had hoped to see Mario, the fabled exporter, but Mario refused to meet



"That scowl might just be what this place needs."



"You'll want to head two blocks south, then one east, then one north and two west, then two more south and one more west . . ."

strangers, so instead Diego picked him up at his cover hotel and brought him to meet Joshua and his wife. For several hours at the house, and then over Glenfiddich at a nearby restaurant, Joshua explained his shark-fin operation. Billy played shaky video of laundry baskets full of fins—from silky sharks and thresher sharks, which have a quota for export; from hammerheads, which can't be exported; and from oceanic whitetips, which are illegal even to hoist aboard a boat. "This is the piece that was missing—the visual," Crosta said. He clasped Billy's arm. "So many great details that would not be in the transcript! I'm very happy." Billy blinked. Earlier, he'd told me, "Andrea and I have never even drunk a beer together, over four or five years. No buddy-to-buddy conversation."

Billy said, "Most of these fins, including the hammerheads, are captured in Costa Rican waters, because they extend far south to include Cocos Island. Beautiful tourist spot for diving."

"Of course, of course," Crosta said. "Of course, they take hammerheads in *Cocos Island National Park.*"

Joshua had gone on to tell Billy about a scheme enabled by greedy officials—the sort of transnational corruption that might interest Homeland Security. Joshua drives to Nicaragua to pick up fins, along with cocobolo, a CITES-protected tree with ruby-colored heartwood. He drops three hundred dollars to customs at the border, and fifteen hundred dollars more to slide the cargo onto a boat in Caldera, uninspected. "He said, 'I can introduce you to the customs guys there.' He also said the Costa Rican government is basically making it O.K. to ship cocobolo out if it comes from outside the country. He told me, 'They started smuggling cocobolo through Costa Rica because the Nicaraguan government confiscated seventy containers. Those containers were later sold into China by'"—he named a leading figure in Nicaragua.

Talerico was shifting between files among the hundreds on her desktop, typing rapidly. "Sometimes I think, If I have a brain stroke, we're all fucked," she muttered.

Crosta said, "This is just when it starts to get interesting. Let's lean into the money, the network, the shipping, the paperwork."

"Diego was doing his best to translate all this from Spanish for me," Billy said. "When we were leaving, Joshua's wife said, 'Diego, you really should pay us, because you are learning so much about the business.'"

Everyone grinned. "I could not have dreamed of more!" Crosta said. "Can we now say these guys are the top three shark-fin traffickers: Mario, Joshua, and Victoria and her husband?"

Mark Davis was pleased but wary. He later told me, "If we had general budget money, we'd do three times as many ops here—and discover five times as many people to go after."

A large bull elephant's tusks can go for more than four hundred thousand dollars on the clandestine market. Most environmental organizations hope to shift our perspective so that we see elephants not as a liquid asset, like a stock or a bond, but as an illiquid one, like a mountain view. Yet some conservationists believe that the only way to save the animals is to financialize them. By one estimate, that same bull elephant, if left alive, could contribute twenty-three thousand dollars a year to its home country's tourism revenues. Ralph Chami, an assistant director at the International Monetary Fund, suggests that animals, by maintaining ecosystems, are already saving us a fortune. According to his calculations, that elephant's carbon-sequestration services make it worth $2.6 million. A blue whale, doing equivalent work in the ocean, is worth at least three million. Chami told me, "Intrinsic-value-of-nature people, your arrogance is actively helping to destroy nature. My crowd are the what's-in-it-for-me people, so I have to speak to them in a language they understand: 'Elephants are quietly saving your butt, so how about you pay them a salary?'"

Chami advocates a framework that works like carbon credits. Charities and companies would buy the carbon offsets of, say, Chile's blue whales, and the money would help to preserve the aquatic ecosystem. Chami acknowledged that the true heroes of marine systems are seagrass and phytoplankton, but said, "We have an affinity for whales. Same with elephants—a baby elephant melts your heart in two seconds." One nettlesome problem is that carbon credits have proved vaporous: the *Guardian* recently determined that many rain-forest-offset credits are "phantom credits" whose purchase provides no benefit to the environment. Also, while some animals help seques-

ter carbon (yay, otters and wildebeests!), some do the opposite (boo, sea urchins!). Under Chami's system, we'd be singling out trophy species to valorize, just as traffickers do.

The larger problem with financialization strategies is that no amount of funding can stave off the greatest threat to wildlife: the human population, which is expected to grow to nearly ten billion by 2050. More people will mean more contact, and more conflict, with animals. Matt Morley, who runs IFAW's wildlife-crime program, told me, "Because we've been successful at controlling poaching, there are now some areas where more elephants are being killed because of efforts to mitigate human-elephant conflict." During the past two years in conservancies in northern Kenya, hunters have killed three elephants for their ivory, and a hundred and thirty because they trampled crops and livestock. "What will ultimately make or break elephants will be our ability to live with animals," Morley said. "Can we? The answer, we found in Europe and North America, where we wiped out all our charismatic megafauna long ago, is no."

ELI's partnerships with U.S. agencies have not yet had the transformative effect that Crosta hopes for. This winter, he tipped off Fish and Wildlife to two shipments of seafood from Joshua's company in Costa Rica to the United States. The agency's inspectors found nothing suspicious. "I guess these people don't *always* send illegal stuff," Crosta said. "Or maybe the inspectors missed it." (Shark fins that have been processed—bleached, dried, and peeled—resemble noodles.) Meanwhile, Mark Davis understood from Fish and Wildlife that, later this month, the authorities would arrest a trafficker whom ELI had identified. Homeland Security was also promising arrests, sooner or later. Crosta was still betting that his targets would eventually be charged with heavier crimes, and nonetheless recoil not from money laundering or human smuggling but from wildlife trafficking. "My *assumption* is that they'll realize, Oh, it was the sea cucumber that got us in trouble," he admitted.

Will the might of the U.S. government change the equation? In 2017, Moazu Kromah, a major ivory trafficker, was arrested in Uganda; the ivory in his shipments came from elephants in seven countries. But he was soon released on bail. Then Fish and Wildlife and the Drug Enforcement Administration got involved. Kromah was extradited to America, and last year he pleaded guilty to trafficking at least ten tons of ivory and a hundred and ninety kilos of rhino horn to Asia and the United States. It was by some measures the most successful prosecution of a transnational crime organization. But his sentence—just sixty-three months, or about what you might serve in the federal system for trafficking four ounces of heroin—has evidently not deterred wildlife crime. "Kromah's network has re-formed around others, and corruption remains in place," Morley told me. "We've got a guy in Uganda in our crosshairs, an offshoot of Kromah—but can we get his case moving there? Very difficult."

Even extinctions merely displace the trade. Glass eels, used in soup and eaten broiled as unagi, can sell for twenty-seven thousand dollars a kilo in Japan. Because Asian glass eels have been fished out, traffickers now have mules fly them in from Europe in suitcases containing hidden water tanks, with controlled temperature and oxygen levels. The demand side, too, is constantly evolving, in a perverse form of natural selection. In southern and central Africa, Vietnamese gangs now compete with the Chinese. And some traffickers have begun evading surveillance by "smurfing" (breaking transactions into units small enough to avoid oversight) and "layering" (setting up a bewildering stack of companies to process transactions).



"I'm under no illusions that law enforcement alone is going to stop wildlife trafficking," Phil Alegranti, a senior official at Fish and Wildlife, said. "The goal is to disrupt, delay, and allow time for demand to be reduced and for the trade to become reprehensible." Efforts to raise global consciousness include a campaign to have the International Criminal Court treat "ecocide" as an atrocity on the level of war crimes and genocide. Traffickers may not be much moved by moral suasion, however. Elliott Harbin, the head of Homeland Security's nascent Wildlife and Environmental Crimes Unit, said, "Andrea is onto something with the idea that you can scare the people who have 'legitimate' businesses to protect. The dabblers you can scare, and there are a lot of them. But the hard-core guys will just be emboldened to take over."

Crosta told me, "What keeps me awake at night is that I'm surrounded by irreplaceable people: Billy, Mark, Chiara—all single points of failure. Also, my project is definitely harder than I thought." When he and I began talking, last summer, ELI's global list of high-level persons of interest contained a hundred and two names. Now it has a hundred and seventy-two—and the kingpins they sell to in China remain unidentified.

In March, Crosta became a U.S. citizen, and he's in a new relationship with a critical-care nurse named Sofya. He's promised to be with her every full moon, even if he has to leave a conference to come home. Since his divorce, he said, he's had a recurring vision of himself as a wolf at the edge of a forest: "There's a long meadow on the border, and beyond it are houses and lights and women and food. And I think, *Ooh, that must be really warm and cozy*. But crossing the meadow was impossible. It was the fear of *feeling*, because if you feel you're fucked." With Sofya, he said, "I became fully aware that I do need the kind of warmth you can only get from humans, once in a while."

At a global scale, that same challenge—mastering one's impulses—has enormous consequences for our species. If we can't transcend our instinct to conquer nature, there won't be much nature left to conquer. Crosta went on, "It's not that I don't give a shit about all these other great ideas—tourist dollars and economic value and everything. I do, but they're way down on my list. For us to save the animals, we have to grow larger than we are. Because wildlife has a right to exist regardless of its economic value, regardless of its usefulness to us in any way. It's the same thought I have had since I was five: Animals are our family. They are my family." ♦

LETTER FROM THE U.K.

CHAOS THEORY

How a disaster expert prepares for the worst.

BY SAM KNIGHT

In another time, or another place, Lucy Easthope says, she would have been a fortune-teller—a woman of opaque origin and beliefs, who travelled from campfire to town square, speaking of calamities that had come to pass and those which hung in the stars. Easthope, who is forty-four, is one of Britain's most experienced disaster advisers. She has worked on almost every major emergency involving the deaths of British citizens since the September 11th attacks, a catalogue of destruction and surprise that includes storms, suicide bombings, air crashes, and chemical attacks. Depending on the assignment, Easthope might find herself immersed at a scene for days, months, or years. "I am the collector of a very specific type of story and the keeper of a very particular type of secret sorrow," she has written.

Easthope is not how you might picture an emergency responder. She does not drive, and has trouble telling left from right. She wears floral dresses and cardigans and suffers from arthritis in her ankles and hips. Her job is to anatomize the pain of a catastrophe and then—through rehearsals, policy pamphlets, heavily appendixed emergency-planning documents, and the force of her personality—attempt to reduce the agony of the next. She normally fails. "You won't get it right," she told me recently. "You will always have an imperfect response." Even on a good day (which in Easthope's world is usually a terrible day), a modification that she has argued for—the phrasing of an emergency text, decent showers at a rescue shelter—is likely to go unnoticed by survivors and responders alike. "The value of me is often only perhaps realized later, or not at all," Easthope said. Her greatest fear is forgetting: that the chain of learning from disasters, fragile and error-prone as it is, breaks one day. Because then there is only despair. She describes herself as a noisy rememberer.

In the late spring of 2017, Easthope was the lead trainer for mass-fatality events at Britain's Emergency Planning College, a government facility that started out, in the nineteen-thirties, as an anti-gas-attack training school. She was increasingly worried about the United Kingdom's ability to cope with a large disaster. Since 2010, as part of a broad program of spending cuts, Conservative-led governments had reduced funding for the country's civil-contingency plans, particularly at the local level. Training and research had become more sporadic. The college had been outsourced to a private contractor. Delivering her courses, Easthope found less room for discussion and dissent. "The college was only allowed to teach doctrine," she said. "You couldn't problematize." The U.K.'s official mass-fatality guidance documents, which she worked from, were eleven years old.

Easthope decided to share her concerns with a small group of academics, police officers, and public officials. She invited the group to a daylong meeting in London, at Church House, the headquarters of the Church of England, an impressive building on the same street as the U.K. Home Office. She asked a pair of colleagues—Imogen Jones, an associate professor of law at the University of Leeds, who specializes in the treatment of the dead, and Lucina Hackman, a forensic anthropologist at the University of Dundee, who is an international expert in disaster-victim identification, or D.V.I.—to attend, too. Church House has wood-panelled walls and a view of Westminster Abbey. Easthope wanted to transcend the customary, acutely task-driven approach to emergency planning and to encourage a more reflective conversation. "I deliberately wanted this different, spiritual vibe, where we could talk without just being crushed all the time," she said.

Easthope called the session Uncertainty Remains, a reference to a study that she had co-authored about a train carrying crude oil that derailed in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, in July, 2013, causing explosions and a fire that killed forty-seven people. Easthope believed that Britain's emergency plans were too focussed on terrorism. Less than a month before the meeting, a suicide bomber had killed twenty-two people coming out of an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, reinforcing the idea that catastrophes were usually the work of some malevolent external force, rather than tragedies of our own making. "Exercises would always train that the bad guy was over *here*," Easthope said. One of her slides at the meeting read, "We are also quite capable of doing it to ourselves." Easthope observed that British emergency planning carried an assumption that the authorities would always be obeyed and listened to. But what would happen if the same authorities were somehow complicit in causing the disaster?

The meeting had an awkward atmosphere. "It was tense," Jones said. One senior coroner—a judicial official who investigates causes of death—arrived late. Another official stepped out to take a phone call. Advisers to the Archbishop of Canterbury asked irresolvable, spiritual questions, which the other delegates were unaccustomed to. Easthope, who has a Ph.D. in medicine, was used to addressing rooms full of adrenalized men with epaulets. But she struggled to convince everyone that there were problems to be addressed. "What she was saying was, We're training for the last disaster, and we should be training for the *next* disaster," Hackman recalled. "I think Lucy was giving them a message they didn't want to hear."

Emergency planning is built around scenarios. After lunch, Easthope sketched out the kind of incident that she was



Lucy Easthope has worked on almost every major emergency involving the deaths of British citizens since 9/11.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRYCE WYMER

worried about. In July, 2009, a fire started by a faulty television set had killed six people in Lakanal House, a public-housing apartment block in South London. The fire surprised emergency personnel when it darted up and down the building's façade, burning through the aluminum-frame cladding in minutes. It challenged the conventional response to an apartment-block fire, which was to advise residents to stay put until the fire was under control. (One victim at Lakanal House spent half an hour on the phone with emergency dispatchers, until she was overwhelmed by smoke.)

Students of disaster know that small calamities often presage larger ones. Easthope's scenario at Church House envisaged a major fire in a high-rise, caused by a gas explosion, or by oversight on the part of local officials. The residents would be a highly diverse community, many of whom didn't speak English well. The fire would burn at a terrific temperature, making the remains of victims difficult to identify. In an instant, people would be stripped of almost everything—their homes, their possessions, their loved ones. Easthope often talks about losing the "furniture of self," a phrase used by the sociologist Kai T. Erikson in his study of a 1972 flood in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, in which some hundred and twenty-five people died and hundreds more were severely traumatized. Easthope was known for proposing complex, demanding scenarios, but Hackman didn't think that this one was unrealistic. "To me, it was a scenario that made sense," she said.

By this point, Easthope was feeling sick. It was a Tuesday, and she had been unwell since the weekend. She had attributed the feeling to nerves. Easthope pays attention to her physical sensations in a way that goes beyond strict forms of reason. "I worry it will kill me," she told me once, of her work. "There is definitely a disaster-related stroke." Easthope has two daughters, who were born after years of failed pregnancies, which affected her health. That afternoon, Hackman, who was trained as a nurse, noticed that Easthope's face had turned a strange, yellowish color and advised her to go to the hospital.

In the early evening, Easthope took a train back to Nottinghamshire, where she lived with her husband, Tom, an airline pilot. Easthope was admitted to the emergency room with acute pancreatitis. She was still awake, in a hospital bed, when she started to receive news of a huge fire in West London. A refrigerator had caught alight in a fourth-floor apartment in Grenfell Tower, a twenty-four-floor public-housing building in North Kensington. Fire crews arrived and put out the kitchen fire at around 1:20 A.M. But, by that point, the flames had escaped, igniting the building's external cladding panels, which had been installed during a recent refurbishment, overseen by the local government. Between 1:23 A.M. and 1:26 A.M., the fire began to climb the tower's façade at four stories per minute. By 1:27 A.M., it had reached the top of the building. For another hour and twenty minutes, the London Fire Brigade advised residents to stay put.

By morning, it was clear that almost everything about the response was going wrong. The Metropolitan Police had not established a survivor-reception center—a standard step in emergency management. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the local government, was overwhelmed. There were only five trained staff available to run its emergency-response center, out of a basement room in the town hall. A key that was needed to open a cupboard, to access the computers, had gone missing. "No one knew what they were doing," one of R.B.K.C.'s contingency-planning officers later testified. Survivors of the fire and residents evacuated from nearby buildings stood in the early-summer sunshine in their pajamas. I was there, reporting on another story, and was struck by a disturbing vacuum of authority and care in one of London's most prosperous districts. "They want us out of the borough," a girl in her late teens said to no one in particular. "It's money, money, money."

Although hundreds of R.B.K.C. officials were mobilized to help, very few clearly identified themselves, adding to the confusion. At one point, there were at least four different temporary shelters, and no reliable list of tower residents. Hundreds of people were feared to have died. Texting and e-mailing from the hospital, Easthope watched the chaos unfold on her phone. A government contact said that the fire was a "Duggan situation"—a reference to the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a Black man, which had sparked riots in London six years earlier. "I'm thinking, Hang on. If they're not activating X, then they're not activating Y," Easthope recalled. "Every kind of domino starts to fall at that point."

Easthope messaged frantically, contacting various agencies, until a family friend—a retired coroner—told her to stop. Her condition deteriorated and she was put on a morphine drip. In the worst cases, acute pancreatitis can lead to organ failure and death. On the afternoon of June 14th, about twenty-four hours after Easthope presented her high-rise scenario, nurses prepared her for surgery. She had her gallbladder removed and was taken to a critical-care unit. Easthope does not equate or compare her feelings or experiences to those of people who have suffered during a disaster. They exist in different categories. On the day of the Grenfell fire, which killed seventy-two people, all she knew was that she had failed, her profession had failed, and now she was going to die.

On a gusty afternoon in May, 1985, a fire began in a pile of rubbish beneath a wooden grandstand at a soccer match between Bradford City and Lincoln City, in West Yorkshire. The stadium was filled with eleven thousand spectators. Toward the end of the first half, television cameras picked up the flames, which rapidly enveloped the stand's rafters and roof. Fans clambered onto the field, or tried to escape through turnstiles onto the street. Television networks broadcast graphic footage of the fire, which killed fifty-six people, later that afternoon. Bob Payne, a woodworking teacher in Birkenhead, near Liverpool, wasn't in the habit of watching soccer, but when he turned on the television he found himself engrossed. "It sounds awfully ghoulish, but I was absolutely fascinated," he said. It was nothing like the movies. One man, on fire, walked across the turf until he fell. Payne did not notice that his six-year-old daughter, Lucy, had been watching silently over his shoulder. "Why didn't somebody help him?" she asked.

Easthope grew up during what Brit-

ish emergency planners call the decade of disaster. Beginning in the late eighties, the country experienced a series of tragedies—an explosion on an oil-drilling platform; the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, over Lockerbie; the sinking of a ferry in the English Channel and of a pleasure boat in the Thames; railway accidents and fires. This run of bad luck and basic safety failures eventually transformed the state's approach to handling disasters. Easthope had unusually probing questions for a child: How could people climb out of a capsized ship? What happened to the bodies? This was "coming from somebody who is really too young to be thinking like that," Payne recalled. Easthope didn't imagine herself as a rescuer, or as someone who could stop things from going wrong; she simply had a vivid sense of being there. "I would just let myself feel it," she told me.

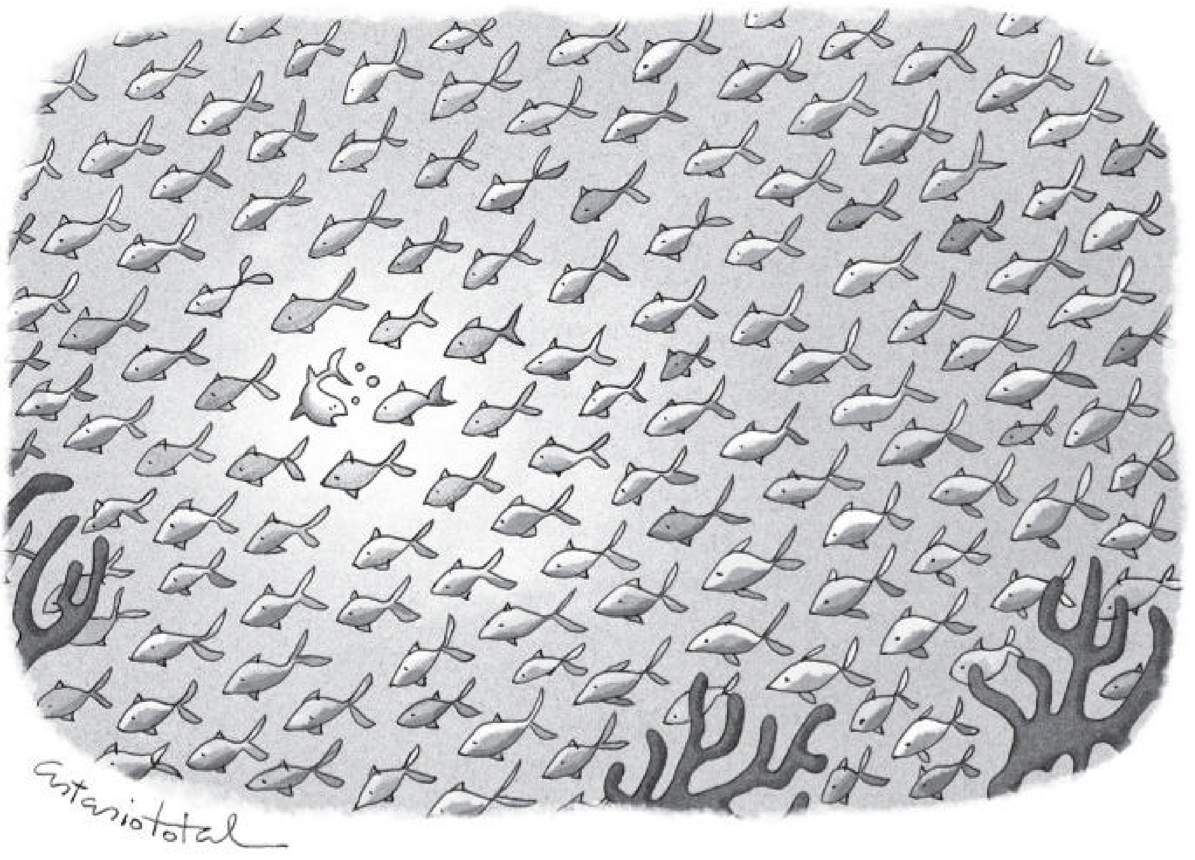
When Easthope was ten, almost a hundred Liverpool supporters were killed in a crush at Hillsborough Stadium, in Sheffield. Classmates of hers, family friends, and pupils of her parents, who were both high-school teachers, had all been at the match. The police falsified records of what happened, and for many years Liverpool fans were blamed for the crush, though it was the officers in charge of the stadium gates who were largely at fault. Easthope was aware of the double injury of the disaster. She had an intimation of the unfairness of the world. In her teens, she read voraciously about the Holocaust and the Second World War. Reading the diary of Anne Frank, she was frustrated by the lack of detail about who had given the family up to the Nazis. "I had a very strong sense of the us and them," she said. Payne made a file of newspaper clippings about the Hillsborough disaster, which Easthope keeps in her hall.

The first e-mail that Easthope ever sent, in 1999, was to introduce herself to Anne Eyre, an academic who specialized in the psychosocial impact of disasters. Eyre was a survivor of Hillsborough and a member of Disaster Action, a campaign group, composed mainly of the bereaved and the survivors of British catastrophes, which argued for stronger corporate accountability and a greater role for victims in investigations. Eyre invited Easthope to a conference at Coventry University. "We need young people like you," she said. Easthope studied law at university. She interned at a coroner's office and with Phil Scraton, a criminology professor at Edge Hill University, whose work uncovering police misconduct at Hillsborough led the Prime Minister, David Cameron, to apologize to the families of the victims, in 2012. Easthope was casting around for a role. "Instead of just feeling it in my body, I wanted to go and help," she recalled. On September 11, 2001, Easthope was back in Birkenhead when her father turned on the TV again. He spent the next three days feeding videotapes into the recorder.

Easthope got an entry-level job at Kenyon International Emergency Services, a disaster-response company retained by airlines and by, among others, the British government. The firm got its start in 1906, when two undertaker brothers—Herbert and Harold Kenyon—were called to Salisbury, where a locomotive had jumped the line, killing twenty-eight people. Easthope was given two hundred pounds to buy a dark suit along with a pair of cargo pants, for attending incidents. The offices were next to an undertaker, in North West London. Easthope and her husband met in college. When he came to pick her up from work, he had to park among hearses that were collecting and delivering bodies.

It was her first glimpse of the apparatus of disaster. "In your mind, you know, the military are very impressive, and the Cabinet Office is very impressive," Easthope said. (The Cabinet





"I'm working on a novel, but it's been hard to find alone time."

Office is the nerve center of the British government, and leads the central government's emergency planning.) "And suddenly it's, like, a lady called Yvonne who can't find her car keys." Easthope sent British forensic experts and mortuary staff to Ground Zero, in New York, and to the scenes of terrorist bombings, in Bali, in 2002. She began to spend time with the dead. "There's no real curtains between any stage," she said. "Once you're hired, you're seeing everything."

Easthope completed a graduate degree in emergency management while on a posting at Brize Norton, a military base in Oxfordshire, where she had helped design a mortuary for British military personnel who were being repatriated from Iraq. One of Easthope's jobs was to sort through body parts—feet and hands, in particular—and to allocate them to the right coffin. She found that the activity did not distress her. If anything, it brought back her childhood feelings of empathy. "They are us," she said, of the remains. "I don't know what it feels like not to feel like that."

At Kenyon, she noticed that very small interventions could make a significant difference to people who were involved in an atrocious event. "They remind me slightly of chaos theory," Easthope said. "They're so tiny but they're so fundamental." Being given a cup of tea, or fresh clothes, *before* being asked what happened to you. Being told the truth, even when it is unbearable. Easthope took a particular interest in the artifacts of the dead. Early in her career, she spent several weeks in a warehouse, drying and sorting the possessions of eleven men who had died in a helicopter crash in the North Sea. (A passenger-plane crash might involve eighty thousand items.) She unfurled compacted love letters and the receipts of final meals. She noticed that well-meaning mortuary staff would fix broken watches, or polish up old wedding rings, interfering in realms dense with memory and love. Easthope's first freelance assignment, after leaving Kenyon, was to write a leaflet for Disaster Action on the care and return of personal effects, emphasizing that everything—meaning everything: compromising text messages, unexplained underwear, damaged clothing—should be offered to the bereaved. After the bombings on the London transport network on July 7, 2005, a senior detective at the Metropolitan Police read the leaflet and recruited Easthope as an adviser. From then on, she would stop by Scotland Yard to consult on packaging for the return of these possessions—a new box for recovered motorcycle helmets, or for the belongings of a child—and get called into a meeting on a plane crash.

Easthope tried to be everywhere at once. For years, she worked as an academic, a trainer, and a roving consultant to the police, coroners, the Home Office, the Cabinet Office, and local governments across the U.K. She advised the United Nations after the terrorist attack on its headquarters in Baghdad, in 2003, and travelled to New Zealand to study the recovery after the Christchurch earthquake, in 2011. If she wrote enough plans, if she attended enough scenes, if she gave her phone number to enough emergency responders, and told them to call her, day or night, could a calamity be tamed? "I couldn't stop the original incident. But by God I'd stop them making the other mistakes," Easthope told me. "I genuinely thought that maybe I could take some of the pain away."

British disaster guidance consists of rigid, repeatable hierarchies: a Strategic Coordinating Group (often referred to as Gold), to oversee the initial emergency; a Recovery Coordinating Group, to guide what happens next; and, if there is a large number of dead, a Mass Fatality Coordinating Group. Easthope's interdisciplinary skills and encyclopedic memory of incidents—she describes herself as a human almanac—mean that she can be involved in all three groups, if necessary. If Easthope has a specialty, it is what emergency planners call the Human Aspect. But she normally works in what she calls the Lucy Box, as an on-call counsellor to whoever is supposed to be in charge.

"When I was in the police and dealing with these sort of things, she was more or less unique. She was the one you would go to," Simon Taylor, a retired detective, who worked with Easthope on the recovery of British victims from Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, which was shot down over Ukraine in 2014, told me. The first time I met Easthope, she said that her job consisted mainly of sitting in high-pressure meetings with a skeptical look on her face, saying, "Are we *really* doing that?" Taylor described her as a candid

friend: "She just makes you stop. . . . Makes you think, Am I actually going to make this worse by doing this?" He added, "She thinks very long term, you know, through to the end and what's going to happen when you come out the other side."

Pat Hagan, a local-government official from Yorkshire, met Easthope in 2007, when he was leading the cleanup of Toll Bar, a poor, close-knit village that had flooded after heavy summer rains. There were rumors that the waters had been diverted to Toll Bar, a low-lying place with a settled Roma and traveller population, in order to save the nearby city of Doncaster. "We were getting criticized all over," Hagan said. Easthope, who lived five miles away, asked to shadow Hagan and his team for her Ph.D. thesis, which was an ethnographic study of a disaster recovery. Hagan went back to his computer and Googled "ethnography." At the time, Easthope was in her late twenties and also working for the Cabinet Office, helping draft Britain's national recovery guidance.

"I knew I was with somebody who had a brain the size of the planet and knew far more, far more than me," Hagan said. "But I always got the impression that she was learning—learning from us, learning from me." Easthope spent the next five years carrying out field work in Toll Bar, observing the dissonance between official emergency plans and how reconstruction played out in reality. Hagan fashioned a temporary hamlet—complete with roads, lighting, and fifty trailers—in a farmer's field, in order to keep neighbors together. He and his team worked out of a Portakabin in the heart of the village. "You've got to be able to deal with a bit of anger, a bit of resentment," Hagan said. "People who could normally cope quite comfortably in everyday life, their coping skills are completely stripped out."

Easthope watched these interactions from a sofa in the corner. "Pat would be in the office, and a little old lady would come in. . . . He would take the lid off a jar of beetroot," Easthope said. When a resident had papers to file in court, Hagan drove him there. "It was like a play," Easthope said. Over time, she stopped merely observing and started getting involved—making tea, tidying up, joining conversations. "Whenever I sat in the background I felt useless and uncomfortable," she wrote in her notes. "Whenever I got involved so much more seemed to happen." In 2011, Easthope gave birth to her first daughter, Elizabeth. She brought her to a meeting, at the local school, of the One O'Clock Club, an informal alliance of Toll Bar women who organized social activities.

After the flood, the number of recorded crimes in Toll Bar dropped by a third. The village attracted national attention for its recovery. Easthope realized that nothing she could plan, or design, would ever capture what it was like to live after a catastrophe, or the alchemy between an inspired local official, such as Hagan, and a community that was eager to rebuild. "The afterward, it's very raw and real," Easthope told me. "It goes well when it's very honest. You see people work in just this very, very focussed way." She noticed that much of the activity was done by women, in defiance of bureaucracy and without access to official funding. Toll Bar revealed the limits of what a planner and her impact assessments could achieve. It made Easthope reconsider whom, exactly, she was advocating for in a disaster. She called her thesis "The Recovery Myth." "It was possibly the beginning of the end, in terms of your loyalty," Easthope said. "Other things stop being so important. . . . You're, like,



Yeah, I will get you your case study. But the hard work being done is over here with these ladies."

In October, 1920, an Anglican curate named Samuel Prince published "Catastrophe and Social Change," a study of a disaster in Halifax Harbor, in Canada. Shortly before 9 A.M. on December 6, 1917, a munition ship, the Mont Blanc, had slowly collided with a Norwegian vessel that was carrying supplies for occupied Belgium. The Mont Blanc caught fire and detonated, causing what was then the largest man-made explosion in history. A blast wave, accompanied by a fireball, destroyed every building within a mile. More than seventeen hundred people died. A piece of the Mont Blanc's anchor, weighing half a ton, came to rest two miles away. Coal and oil, dispersed into the sky, came back down as black rain.

Prince's church, St. Paul's, in downtown Halifax, was hit by shrapnel. It served as a temporary hospital and morgue during the disaster. Prince observed throughout the city a "very general consciousness which seemed to draw all together into a fellowship of suffering." Social distinctions fell away. Wounded soldiers gave up their beds. Cafés and drugstores handed out goods for free. The people of Halifax looked after one another, preferring their own initiatives and decisions to "the intrusion of strangers." Afterward, Prince discerned a link to the work of Peter Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist, who used the term "mutual aid" to describe an alternative, coöperative model of human society, which ran counter to the social Darwinism that was fashionable at the time. "Catastrophe and the sudden termination of the normal which ensues become the stimuli of heroism," Prince wrote, "and bring into play the great social virtues of generosity and of kindliness."

"Catastrophe and Social Change" became a founding text in the field of disaster studies. In the nineteen-fifties, the U.S. military, looking for insights into how to manage society after a nuclear attack, funded sociologists to analyze the ways that people behaved during large-scale emergencies. Instead of finding Hobbesian dioramas of disorder and panic, or dazed, wordless automatons—the Hollywood version of disaster—the sociologists discovered that, during a crisis, people often experienced deep feelings of solidarity and belonging. (One of the researchers, Charles E. Fritz, had been a captain in the U.S. Army Air Corps during the Second World War. Afterward, he studied the impact of bombing on the German civilian population. "People living in heavily bombed cities had significantly higher morale than people

in lightly bombed cities," he wrote.) Reports of looting in disasters, for example, were almost always exaggerated. In some cases, calamities were made worse for the victims not because of their own actions but because of the incompetence or prejudice of the authorities, a phenomenon later identified as "élite panic."

The heroic phase of a disaster is now a recognized, albeit time-bound, feature of emergency planning. Practitioners often wish that it would last a little longer. In 2011, Tomohide Atsumi, a social scientist at Osaka University, observed that earthquake survivors in Japan enjoyed a resurgence of fellow-feeling when they volunteered to help in subsequent earthquakes. A decade before the COVID-19 pandemic, Rebecca Solnit explored post-disaster utopias in her book "A Paradise Built in Hell," arguing that these ephemeral, temporary societies could provide a model for a world beset by climate change and other quickening emergencies. "The real question is not why this brief paradise of mutual aid and altruism appears," Solnit wrote, "but rather why it is ordinarily overwhelmed by another world order."

But there are also disasters that have no utopian phase. Theorists sometimes call these exceptions "corrosive community" incidents, for their prevailing atmosphere of fear or mistrust. Theresa May, the British Prime Minister at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire, visited the remains of the building the day after the incident, but she did not meet with survivors or with the bereaved. The leaders of R.B.K.C., the local government, resigned after weeks of protests. In 2019, Dany Cotton, the commissioner of the London Fire Brigade, retired early after saying that she would not change anything about the firefighting response.

"It was a very toxic environment," Easthope told me. "There was this constant, constant fear of the community, and there still is." In October, 2017, she delivered her final mass-fatality training course at the Emergency Planning College, which had been scheduled before the disaster. "They paused the training and the course because the message they were going with was, 'This was unexpected and unplanned for,'" Easthope said. "To have your courses cancelled . . . it starts to feel like you are shit as well."

After the fire, she had been drafted, briefly, into the official response but was unsure whether she was there to be listened to, to make up the numbers, or to be kept in line. "It is a very physical feeling. Everything just drains out, into the feet, into the floor," she said. "You know there's absolutely no point." At a meeting in July, a senior official at the Cabinet Office advised Easthope to lie low for a while. (A spokesperson for the Cabinet Office said that the department did not recognize Easthope's version of events.)

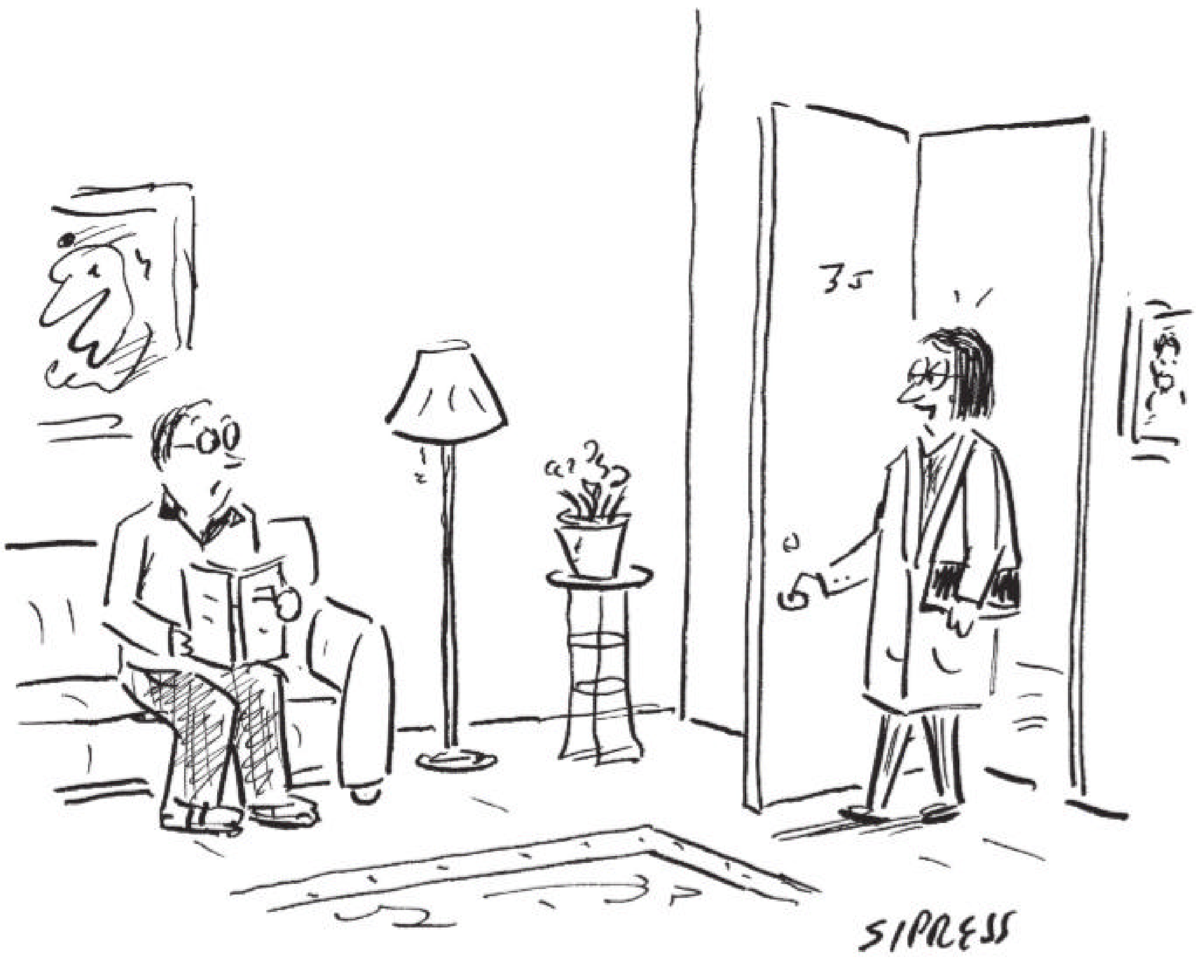
Easthope spent the rest of the summer trying to convalesce. She had trouble sleeping. She felt like she couldn't fully breathe. She had seen plenty of colleagues struggle when an emergency defied their attempts to order it. "In terms of the things that you see on the night: the trauma or the bodies or the personal effects," she said. "There's all sorts of good programs for that. The hardest trauma, in responders to disaster, is humiliation. It's that sense of utter failure." One day, Easthope's three-year-old daughter, Mabel, grabbed her by the cheeks and asked her where she had gone.

In the fall, a National Health Service mental-health team that was working in North Kensington contacted Easthope. The group wanted to understand how communities recover from disaster. Because some of the team members lived near the tower, she spoke to them in the same way that she would address survivors or the bereaved. "I never look at a room and assume," Easthope told me. "You shouldn't get two faces."

In time, council staff and community groups heard about Easthope's workshops and started attending. (Some R.B.K.C. staff had worked with elderly and disabled residents of Grenfell Tower who had been unable to escape.) Easthope brought case studies from her library. "You were like somebody with a bottle of water in the desert," she recalled. Easthope spoke about the oil explosion in Lac-Mégantic, and about the impressive civic recovery effort that followed. "People would fall on that," she said.



"Welcome back to the true-crime podcast. Today, we are live from this house I just broke into."



"The doctor says my hearing's fine, but he wants to check out your mumble."

• •

Easthope also shared the recovery graph, a standard tool among emergency planners—a faltering zigzag of heroism, social cohesion, disillusionment, and slow, eventual reconstruction which describes the emotional phases of most disasters—and explained that things would probably get worse. In 2018, Easthope met Barry Quirk, a veteran government official in London who had been hired to run R.B.K.C. after the fire. "Lucy, I would say, was the first person that actually gave us perspective," he said. "We clung onto her like a kid to her mother's apron strings for about four years."

Quirk asked Easthope to meet with local officials who were attempting to rehouse and support survivors of the fire, many of whom had lost family members as well as their homes. "These are questions that people really haven't faced in London since the Blitz," Quirk said. Easthope suggested that survivors would probably want practical help at first—getting new I.D.s, housing, health care—with their psychological needs likely to escalate later. She pointed out the incompleteness of some gestures. Officials had handed out prepaid debit cards to Middle Eastern families in order to replace lost heirlooms, such as cooking pots that had been passed down through generations. She said when things were unfixable. "Lucy understood all that in a way that those of us who were sort of surfing the emotions for the first time in our lives didn't," Quirk said. "People would come back from the sessions and say, 'I feel so much better. I understand where we are in the scheme of things.'"

By the first anniversary of the fire, Easthope was advising health workers and the leadership of R.B.K.C., in addition to meeting regularly with community organizations, which were desperate for some form of accountability. "She did straddle, I suppose, these two worlds—of the public servants and those who were bereaved and surviving," Quirk said. In 2019, Easthope brought a box of books and DVDs about Hillsborough to the offices of Grenfell United, one of the survivor groups. "I still don't think they realize the extent of the betrayal," she said. A public inquiry into the fire started hearing evidence in 2018 and has not yet delivered its conclusions. (Easthope has been advising lawyers representing the residents of the tower.) So far, the disaster has cost R.B.K.C. around four hundred and fifty million pounds, nearly two-thirds of which has been spent on providing housing support to survivors.

Easthope sometimes compares herself to a therapist. "There's an 'alongside' that she does that's not like the other experts," Susan Rudnik, an arts psychotherapist, told me. "She isn't *doing* anything. She's just with you." Rudnik lives a few blocks from Grenfell Tower and is the founder of Latimer Community Art Therapy, which has worked with more than a thousand people from the neighborhood affected by the fire. (Easthope serves on its advisory board.) When people ask Easthope what she has learned from Grenfell, she struggles to find the right words. She does not speak of recovery. She does not say that she has helped. "What does it mean to have a crisis, about whether any of this will make any difference at all?" she asked me once.

Easthope runs fewer government training courses these days. Since 2017, she has found it increasingly exhausting—both physically and conceptually—to bridge the gap between the doctrine of disaster management and its actual manifestation. But, a couple of months ago, I went to watch her run a session on disaster recovery on a military base near Telford, not far from the Welsh border. Easthope's father drove her. She had been asked to address teams of emergency responders from across the Midlands. The training took place in the officers' mess hall, which smelled of wool and old tobacco. There was a portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh on the wall and a piece of pale masonry in a display case, a relic from the Battle of Waterloo.

Easthope's teaching manner was somewhere between senior midwife and standup comic. She wore a dark dress and had a pinkish-gray scarf tied around her neck. Her long hair was streaked with gray. When she wanted an attendee to do something, she told him that he had nice eyes. You could locate her in the crowded room by the echo of her laugh.

"We're going to be using a lot of 'when' today. I don't use 'if.' I don't touch wood too much," Easthope said. "It is when, *when* these emergencies happen." In spite of her experiences witnessing protocols fail or be subverted, Easthope

still argues strongly for disaster and recovery plans. She has no time for people (normally male uniformed commanders) who believe they are dealing with something that no one has ever suffered through before. "Don't go out there with 'unique.' Don't go out there with 'unprecedented.' Don't go out there with 'This was a terrible incident we couldn't have foreseen,'" she said. "You are walking plowed, furrowed fields that other people have walked, and they are there to guide and support you."

Easthope mixed supportive messages for the disaster planners with challenging asides. She encouraged them to think of themselves as lantern bearers, one step ahead of their political or operational superiors. "You say, 'Don't worry. I've got a torch to get us through this,'" she said. At the same time, she was frank about the limits and the pitfalls of her field: "The disaster doesn't cause all of the harms—you do." At one point, Easthope teased a central-government official who had come from London. "The rumors that you have come to see just how off-piste I go from the official guidance are, of course, not true," she said. "Whatever you say, just tell them it was great."

Her training scenario was a fire at a disused cinema in Shrewsbury. There was some damage to surrounding buildings, and the train station was closed. There were unconfirmed reports that homeless people had been sleeping in the basement of the cinema. The delegates worked in teams, filling out impact-assessment forms and setting up imaginary Recovery Coordinating Groups, to steer the response. Easthope moved among the tables, listening in and asking questions. One team was worried about a possible toxic plume from the fire, or water contamination.



"I really liked this group's approach because they went dark quickly," she said.

As the exercise progressed, about twenty sets of human remains were found in the basement—likely victims who would be hard to identify. Easthope rattled off incidents from the past twenty years with possible parallels: a fuel-depot fire, in Hertfordshire, in 2005; the deaths of thirty-nine Vietnamese stowaways in a truck, discovered in Essex, in 2019; the collapse of a forty-five-ton wall at a recycling plant, in Birmingham, which killed five African workers, in 2016. She explained how forensic anthropologists would make a first estimate of the death toll, known as an M.N.I., or minimum number of individuals. "It's things like pelvises or skulls," Easthope said. "Something like a pelvis, you generally only have one." During breaks, Easthope sat in a chair in a corner, messaging with officials on the island of Jersey, where she has been advising on concurrent recoveries from a fishing-trawler accident and a gas explosion, which together killed thirteen people in December.

At lunch, Easthope observed that many of the conditions that had made her so agitated in the early summer of 2017 still remained. As budgets for disaster planning and training in the U.K. have contracted, the government has emphasized the optics and political management of emergencies. A recurring theme during the recovery workshop was what officials call "grip"—the ability to demonstrate to senior politicians and the media that responders are in charge. Easthope's insights from previous disasters could protect only so much against trauma, fatigue, and a sense of isolation. "That room there, probably a third won't work again after a big incident," Easthope said, when we were out of earshot. "It burns through staff."

In December, 2019, Easthope kept meeting people who had a cough they couldn't shake. The following month, she started receiving calls from mortuary managers who were talking about a complex pneumonia that seemed to be killing people in their fifties and sixties. "Is this the Wuhan thing?" they asked. "I said, 'Yeah, it probably is, but don't worry,'" she told me. Easthope assured them that someone from the gov-

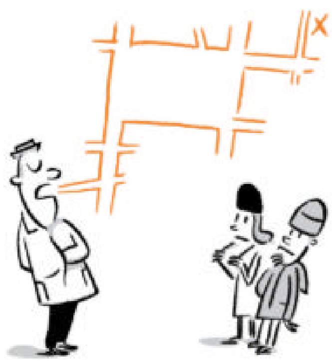
ernment would be in touch soon. She had been involved in pandemic-related exercises and planning for more than a decade. She was part of an "excess death" planning group at the Home Office. In 2016, the British government had run Exercise Cygnus and Exercise Alice, rehearsals for an influenza pandemic and a coronavirus outbreak, respectively.

But, as the number of cases in Britain rose and Boris Johnson's government entertained the idea of a "herd immunity" strategy to weather the pandemic, Easthope wondered whether there was a coherent emergency plan, after all. Officials from across local and central government called her, asking for any pandemic-guidance documents that she had in her archive. It was a case of what Donald MacKenzie, a Scottish sociologist, describes as the "certainty trough"—when those people closest to a technology have less faith than an average citizen that it will actually work.

Easthope moved her parents in with her and stopped letting her older daughter ride horses, in case she had an accident and the ambulance was delayed. She joined Twitter and became increasingly vocal about her concerns. "I think a lot of us in planning came up with our own ethical framework," Easthope said. "And then you're fully deviant. At that point, you have fully left behind the idea that this government has your back."

The previous summer, while attempting to write a review paper about the Grenfell fire, Easthope wrote a description of herself arriving at the scene of a plane crash. She found an agent and starting drafting a memoir. In 2018, Tom, Easthope's husband, had stopped flying because of an inner-ear condition, which turned out to be incurable. Easthope decided to change the way she worked. She focussed on what she could control. "I couldn't do so much," she said. "It had to have a purpose." In the days before the first COVID lockdown, Easthope helped LCAT, the art-therapy charity, move its activities online. Later in the spring, the British Department of Health used Easthope as an adviser, mainly for excess-death planning. "I just thought, This is the end of times," she said. As the first wave of coronavirus deaths rose, the book began to flow. "When the Dust Settles"—which mixes disaster-grade C.S.I. with *hiraeth*, a Welsh word expressing a deep longing for something that is gone—was published in the U.K. last March and became a best-seller.

Easthope now lives with her family in a pair of former workers' cottages in the Welsh Marches. When I visited recently, the roadside was thick with daffodils. Sheep grazed in the surrounding fields. Easthope said that she had always wanted to live in a house with bulbs planted in the garden.



On March 1st, the British government announced that it would appoint an independent public advocate and a panel of expert advisers to represent the survivors of future disasters and the bereaved. The reform was a long-standing request of activists. Until recently, Easthope explained, she might have hoped to be appointed as an adviser. But she was now enjoying bringing her work to nonspecialist audiences and questioning official policy from the sidelines. "I was sort of sitting in the bath about two months ago, and I thought, I'm quite happy with this position that I've adopted now," she said. "Which is, I'm not going to wait, I'm not going to be good enough or compliant enough to be on certain things."

The first hearings for the U.K.'s COVID inquiry will take place in June. Easthope is not expecting much: "Do I think we would handle the next one differently? Yes. Does that mean better? No. Does bereavement get any easier? No."

A few days later, Easthope was in London. We agreed to meet at the LCAT office, not far from Grenfell Tower. It was a cold, breezy morning. Almost six years after the fire, the burned-out shell of the apartment block is still standing, wrapped in white-and-gray material, which flapped in the wind—an intolerable monument. Painted wooden panels form a perimeter around the base of the site, which is next to a high school. Poems, photographs, and handwritten messages adorn the panels, expressing anger and, in smaller quantities, the unreasonable hope that can stem from the worst catastrophes: "Let beauty rise out the ashes."

At LCAT, I sat with Rudnik in the room where she ran the first therapy sessions, three days after the fire. At the time, the room, which was part of a disused community center, had been stacked high with donated bottled water. "We've got taps," Rudnik deadpanned. "I sort of felt that was quite symbolic—to put out the fire, really." LCAT provided art therapy to five hundred and seventy-three young people last year. I asked Rudnik how the disaster felt now. "It's almost been internalized by the community as a sort of ever-present weight," she said. Like Easthope, she was wary of the word "recovery." She preferred to think about finding meaning, or purpose. "What we would ideally want is change in the law, prosecutions, actual justice—and that feels far, far, far away," Rudnik said. "Making something of purpose, in the meantime, feels like the only option." She was proud of bringing meaningful support to her neighborhood. "It's not plain sailing. There is no utopia," she said. "But today I feel it's worth it. I don't always feel like that."

We wondered where Easthope was. She gets lost most times she visits. As a therapist, Rudnik was familiar with the idea of supervision. LCAT's twenty-one art therapists all received external guidance, to help them in their practice. I asked Rudnik if she had ever considered where Easthope got her support from. "I do wonder, and I think, Where does it all go?" Rudnik said. "But maybe it's a bit like . . . *this* is the purpose. This is it. The processing is in the work." Easthope came through the door a few minutes later, in a gale of laughter. Her taxi had gone around the block a couple of times. She was wheeling a suitcase and wearing a long coat. "I could not look more like a strange woman interested in your community," she said. After this, she was going to record a podcast. That week marked the third anniversary of Britain's first coronavirus lockdown and the twentieth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Every day is a step on a recovery graph. Easthope and Rudnik said hello, hugged, and went to the kitchen to make tea. ♦



Nicole Krauss

LONG ISLAND

 ILLUSTRATION BY JAVI AZNAREZ

Riding the brakes bumper to bumper down Thirty-fourth Street, at last we cross Second Avenue and our father toes the gas and spins the giant steering wheel, mahogany and fit for a ship, for that's what this metallic pink-champagne-colored Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham is: an eighteen-and-a-half-foot urban yacht, and the least practical vehicle imaginable for sailing through bankrupt, crime-ridden, late-nineteen-seventies New York City. We follow the slight curve of the down ramp until we're sucked into the mouth of the Midtown Tunnel with a *whomp*, and the pressure changes as the car descends, the soundscape becomes tamped down, interiorized, like when we jump into the pool and hear the thud of blood in our ears. Kneeling by the window, because there are no seat belts to prevent us, we see the grimy white wall tiles smear past in a dizzying, almost nauseating way; even the light is grimed and fluorescent-dim, flickering to the tune of a seizure.

Halfway through, claustrophobia sets in and it really does seem as if there will never be an end to it, never a light at the end of the tunnel, while above the brown and vaguely furry ceiling of the Cadillac and the exhaust-grayed ceiling of the tunnel itself lies the dark, slurry bottom of the East River, with its Metropolitan Museum-grade collection of suicided and murdered bodies. But, just when it seems as though we, too, may somehow get trapped and die prematurely down there, the lane at last veers, daylight shines forth through the arch up ahead, and we are spat out onto the other shore and guided onto the gentle incline that leads to the still cash-only toll plaza, and beyond that, aglow with tail- and headlights, to the great shimmering path of the Long Island Expressway, whose construction began the year Hitler invaded Poland and thus expanded his continental ambitions for the mass murder of the Jews, a fact that isn't entirely lost on us, for once we pass through the rich complication of Queens and the jam of cars starts to fall away, when the expressway clears and the Fleetwood Brougham can finally set sail, a feeling of freedom rises in the back of our throats, the sense of getting away that accompanies all forward acceleration, and with it the knowledge that if we kept riding that feeling as far as it would take us, if our arguing parents missed our exit, the strip malls and houses would also fall away, and we would reach first the forests and then the coast, and, at last, a sense of America, which, to our ancestors who were shot or gassed forty years ago, might as well have been the moon. But for now the Cadillac, crossing two lanes and nearly kissing the front grille of a tractor-trailer, exits just in the nick of time and slides like a hearse into the suburban silence of our new world.

For our father has discovered a property. Discovered it as Vespucci discovered America: by accident, looking for something else. And so we, who never intended to leave New York City, were never scheduled to leave it, have left New York City: left Sutton Place, left the doorman who pinched our fat cheeks; left our view of the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge and the red neon Pepsi-Cola sign, which every night bled into the pitch-black river and suggested that capitalism could be beautiful, too; left the graffitied perimeter walls of Central Park; left the Central Park Zoo, which was as far into that lawless park as we were allowed to go, lest we be mugged, or worse; left the United Nations International School, on First Avenue, where we tussled and exchanged snot, tears, and undiplomatic, even totally despotic ideas with the diplomat kids from Europe, South America, and Asia; left the Turtle Bay Music School, where we would soon have graduated from playing the triangle (method courtesy of that Nazi favorite Carl Orff) to mastering Bach; left Bach, too, whose counterpoint we were taken to listen to at Avery Fisher Hall, where we had to be stuffed with Raisinets so that we wouldn't complain out loud. We have left everything we know—elevators and Checker cabs, Walk and Don't Walk signs, fiscal crises, social disorders, F. A. O. Schwarz, the governance of Mayor Koch—because our father took a wrong turn somewhere, on land that the Quakers wrestled from the Massapequa, farmed, and then sold to industrialist robber barons at the end of the nineteenth century, and out there, on the not yet fully subdivided and still semi-wild North Shore, he came across a For Sale sign, in front of a large and implausible estate that spoke to his strange, "Garden of the Finzi-Continis"-style dreams, and our mother, exhausted by years of trying to drag her highly willful children through a richly cultured, vandalized city, did not have the inner resources to protest.

Now, once we have finally got through to the distant, argumentative country of the front seats and registered our appeal for the release of the child-safety lock that was installed to keep us from accidentally triggering the switch that would close the window on our necks, we push the silver switches on the passenger-door consoles and the back windows groan as they lower halfway. Halfway because that is all that G.M. trusts us with, we the untamed children of the late seventies, the last of the unsupervised, who, if the windows were to lower all the way, might well jump out. Etan Patz won't go missing until the following year, so we children are still considered safe on the streets and with strangers but not with fully open car windows. All the same, halfway is not nothing. Halfway is still enough for us to stick out our heads and get the air in our ears, to get our hair whipping across our faces until the wind catches it and pushes it back and we can finally see it all—see the green and the wide and the bright, and the empty, too: the empty and totally scary vista of suburban Long Island.

The house on the property our father bought stood atop one of the highest hills on Long Island, and was condemned. We might as well have been the Addams Family buying real estate, the Munsters. The Spanish roof tile, laid in 1891, had proved too heavy and caved in. A car had crashed through one of the house's mock-Tudor walls. Rusty beer cans floated in the wishing well. The copper Victorian cupola was askew and had to be pulled down; with it went the views all the way to the Atlantic. But the ocean was still out there, dark and roiling, as we were reminded whenever the wind blew west and brought the salt air, and from time to time it rained so heavily that the great lawn flooded and seagulls wheeled wildly inland. The estate teetered on the farthest edge of the New World; at any moment our father might change his mind, switch course, and, as in a film that's rewound and everything reverses, head back, taking us with him: back to Europe, or back farther, to the Levant, where he'd spent the only happy years of

his childhood. But, for the time being, we were living in America, which was not a place to live, as our grandfather often said, only a place to make a living.

The estate had been built for a Wall Street tycoon in the eighteen-nineties. No owner had lived in the house since the death, in the nineteen-thirties, of the second one, a lawyer who'd been appointed to distribute German patents seized during the First World War. Since then, time and weather had delivered it to a state beyond repair. Once upon a time, the house had hosted members of the Rockefeller, Morgan, Frick, Roosevelt, Auchincloss, and Mellon families, who had danced below the terrace on a polished floor of aquamarine, while ten thousand orange lanterns illuminated the forest that enclosed the estate. But, by the time our father came upon it, its vast ruins were inhabited only by two octogenarian twins, caretakers of what survived of the Gilded Age, whose remaining glory was a pair of Roman stone lions that guarded the entrance, and the three-hundred-year-old copper-beech trees that had been carted in by teams of horses and now stood as a measure for the passage of light and wind. Pacing on the lawn, looking out at the view, our father might have liked to quote some lines from "The Great Gatsby," if he could have remembered them.



The gazebos, with their conical terracotta-tile roofs, were covered with brambles and vines, as was a long red-brick garden wall set with antique marble plaques. Later, when the jungle had been stripped away, one of these turned out to be from an Italian Crusader who'd brought it back from Jerusalem as a souvenir. Before our father bought the house, during the period when the estate was being divided up and sold off in parcels, a blue-and-white enamel Madonna and Child had been stolen—pried right off the wall—which, as far as our father was concerned, seemed appropriate, or even as it should be, since souvenirs from Jerusalem made sense in his world, whereas to live under the gaze of any Christian icon, no matter how grace-filled, was verboten. That he did not consider the symbolic significance of the theft of the heads of Beethoven, Bach, Chopin, Schubert, Brahms, and Haydn that had sat atop six tall granite pedestals in the garden—i.e., that culture, too, was largely verboten in the suburbs of Long Island, and that we were to be raised in a space of vanished heads—was a not insignificant oversight. But our father had more pressing concerns, born of esoteric fantasies and psychological compulsions that stood a chance of being unravelled only while he was lying on his back on a couch, if he were willing, which he was not.

Other treasures, too heavy to steal—a Roman sarcophagus, a seventeenth-century wishing well from Verona—had remained in their place in the formal English gardens, which were designed by the less talented sons of Frederick Law Olmsted. These were laid out on three levels, with a shade garden on the east and west, and a great lawn below. Down there, where the grass had grown to six feet, there also lived, in a small house, the former stable boy, who was now past ninety and made his way up the ha-ha with the help of a cane. He and the octogenarians, who'd had their fill of shepherding deranged beauty, handed our father the keys and departed for other worlds.

Much of the house had to be torn down, but our quixotic father saved its two most spectacular rooms, a grand living room and a chapel with twenty-five-foot ceilings, both of which were Jacobean and had been dismantled in England, shipped to America, and reassembled here. Around these antique, wood-panelled rooms, the architect our father hired—German and famous for his brutalism—planned a modern masterpiece, but one whose artfulness forwent comfort and livability. He proposed suspending our—the children's—bedrooms on platforms in the chapel, which could be accessed by ropes, pulleys, and suspension bridges, an idea that was only narrowly overruled by our mother, who dug in her heels and used whatever she still had of her mother's German: *Achtung; Nein; Ich erziehe meine Kinder nicht als Luftmenschen*. Our bedrooms were grudgingly built instead in the new part of the house, but, because our father ran out of money, they were tiny: everything was within arm's reach of the bed, as in the sleeping compartments of the space shuttle that would explode as we watched a few years later. We lived crowded into this new wing, while the huge old rooms remained forbidding and cold, too expensive to heat, salvaged and restored but impossible to integrate: a lesson in how we might learn to live with history.

When we arrived in the Cadillac, the house was still unfinished. There were no doors on the rooms, and we had to avoid stepping with bare feet on the upturned nails on the carpet-tack strips that had yet to receive any carpet. Half the house was sheeted with plastic to keep out the rain, which found its way in anyway and flooded the basement. Trained as an aerospace engineer, our father employed himself as the construction manager in order to reduce expenses. He could afford the work only in stages, so it stretched on and on, with no end in sight. In those years, when both our house and our psyches were under construction, this eternal unfinishedness became, for us, a kind of philosophy of being. Our world was always in process, never complete, and eventually we lost faith in the idea of completion. If there was any fixed point in our minds, it was what we had left behind, what we'd had to escape back there in order to be here, with *here* being too expensive and elusive to ever finalize, and *there* being the claustrophobic dead end of history. Between these two points was a long and abstract journey that, judging by our father, involved the shaping of character.

After a series of hirings and firings, our father settled on a few skilled workmen who met his standards, and these he hired permanently. This cabal of carpenters, masons, and painters became fixtures in our family, slowly raising a fortress around us, according to our father's instructions. They built and restored, levelled and hammered, sanded and spackled, and became involved, in one way or another, in all aspects of our family's life. They took us to get our hair cut, and when we missed the bus they drove us to school in their vans, which had no back seats, only a long front bench that we all piled onto together, rolling with the sharper turns, while behind us paint cans banged loudly against the metal walls.

Our favorite, Mo, had a black van, and because, in the months after Etan Patz's face started showing up on milk cartons, someone driving a black van around our neighborhood was rumored to have tried to grab children and stuff them into it, whenever Mo pulled up at school our classmates went silent and scattered. When I wet my pants in the middle of recess one day, our mother was out, and it was Mo who was delegated to bring me fresh underwear. These he handed across the threshold of the classroom in a brown paper bag, a detail he might have lifted from the aesthetics of a drug deal.

There was also Luigi, from Calabria, who, in his white T-shirt and painter's pants, with black orthotic shoes and a ring of frizzy hair horseshoed around an otherwise bald pate, had the look of a clown in our father's experimental theatre. His English was limited. He relied heavily on gesture, and his face was always exploding into grins or grimaces that did the work of the language he didn't have.

There were endless rounds of sanding and skim-coating the walls; innumerable applications of the spirit level, whose tiny bubble floating in yellow-green liquid so rarely reported a perfect balance. By the time it was reached, and the walls were finished with their final coat of eggshell white, they had achieved a kind of sacred status. We weren't allowed to touch them lest we leave smudges or stains. We moved through the house at a distance from these pristine white walls, but out of the corners of our eyes and on the outskirts of our thoughts we were always aware of their perfection. The walls were an homage to a deity that we had been taught to respect and fear, and, as with all sacred objects made for the purpose of supplication, if we were careless and caused them damage we could bring down upon ourselves grave consequences, beginning with our father's wrath. Only when I was a little older, and first saw photos of buildings bombed during the war, their ruined interior walls exposed to the exterior, did our father's obsession take on a more nuanced meaning.

Along with Mo and Luigi, and Tony, who laid bricks, there was Andre, a craftsman who had done his apprenticeship in Holland, then come to America as a seaman and jumped ship. He was a prima donna, always getting into arguments with our father, who he believed didn't fully appreciate his mastery. Insulted, he would disappear for a week, then return again without a word. For more than a year, he lay on his back on a platform atop scaffolding in the grand salon, restoring the wedding-cake plaster filigreed ceiling. He was always there working with his delicate tools, his face covered in a fine white dust, unless he was on the outs with our father, in which case the platform sat vacant. One day, after yet another walkout, our father switched course: rather than greeting Andre upon his return with the usual rage, he casually addressed him as Michelangelo. This sly concession seemed to assuage something in the Dutchman. Thereafter, he was never again called anything else, and, like his namesake, he remained on his back atop the scaffolding, returning the ceiling to its former glory, then surpassing it. Years later, when I stood in the Sistine Chapel gaping up at the hand of Adam reaching for the long finger of God, I couldn't help feeling a certain pride that came from my personal association with the miracle overhead, as if my own strange childhood were implicated there. After all, the parallels weren't hard to see: in the scene following the one painted by the great artist, God would sequester Adam in a beautiful garden with incredible trees and a dubious plan to keep him safe—though safe from what and safe from whom would always be the question.

In those years, our father was still in the family business with our grandfather. They owned two factories, one in New York and the other in Israel, both of which produced high-precision gears. The Israeli factory made replacement parts for a fleet of French Mirage fighter jets that the Israeli Air Force had purchased in the early sixties and which had contributed to Israel's victory over Syria, Jordan, and Egypt in the Six-Day War.

The business seemed to be plagued by problems, which our father brought home and took upstairs to his bedroom, to shout about on the phone with his father or discuss in strained tones with our mother. Their voices travelled through the heating ducts and, owing to some acoustical phenomenon, arrived amplified in our bedrooms. In this way, we caught the broadcast of all sorts of things we should never have known about, including the news that the manager at the Israeli factory had been sent a package bomb. Only thanks to some



"Do you have any tricks better suited for an increasingly cashless society?"

malfunction of the detonator were the manager's secretary and everyone around her saved from being blown to bits.

For a while, that seemed to be the end of it. But then a letter with a Syrian postmark arrived in our mailbox. Signed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary faction of the P.L.O.—it was addressed to our father, who, the letter stated, was on its blacklist, and if he failed to show proof of having divested his holdings within six months there would be a price to pay.

Our father went immediately to the Israeli Mission, which had an office in the city on Third Avenue, and was, in those days, a thin cover for the Mossad. They told him not to worry, that they would follow up and "take care of it." But as our father was unsure of what that meant, and they were not inclined to give updates, he gathered the workmen and applied them to the task of raising a ten-foot chain-link fence around our property's perimeter. We watched as the ground was levelled so that it would be flush with the new fence, preventing anyone from slithering underneath. Then we observed the posts being pounded in one by one, and the great rolls of fencing unfurled and secured in place. The posts were capped in a special way to allow for the addition of barbed wire. Barbed wire! Only at the last minute did our mother put her foot down, refusing to live as if inside a prison camp. Perhaps she had begun to suspect that our father's fantasies were paranoid, even delusional. After all, it didn't take much to post a threatening letter from Syria—but what was the likelihood that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine would dispatch a terrorist to Long Island, at considerable cost and risk, to go after the fifty-per-cent owner of a small factory that produced spare parts for the navigational systems of Israeli planes? In any case, the unused barbed wire remained on the property for a long time, waiting in ominous spiked rolls in the shade of a magnolia tree.

Still, for our father, a fence wasn't enough. Indeed, the question of what would be enough to keep us safe—from terrorists, neighbors, history—became less and less clear. One day, we came home from school and discovered that he'd had panic buttons installed in every bedroom: a small red circle that, if pressed, set off a deafening alarm and sent an emergency signal directly to the police. A few days later, he handed us each a portable panic device attached to a chain, which we were to wear around our necks when playing outside. These pieces of panic jewelry were constantly getting lost, and our friends from school were always pressing the alluring red panic buttons in our bedrooms. Soon after that, a motorized gate was installed at the bottom of the driveway—it was forever getting stuck—as well as a surveillance system with cameras that observed all possible approaches and broadcast them to a black-and-white TV set on the kitchen counter, which we watched while eating breakfast, zoning out to the grainy footage that confirmed that we remained, for now, safely alone with ourselves.

A year after we moved to Long Island, our mother's parents, who lived in Jerusalem, came to visit. They toured the experimental German house and the Jacobean rooms, walked in the English gardens, and asked themselves, loud enough for everyone else to hear, what kind of place this was for Jews. In other words, they failed to see the psycho-historical connections. Our father, born to immigrants who, like his in-laws, had got out of Europe just before the rest of their families were murdered, had spent his early years in a fourth-floor walkup in Brooklyn, and used to remind us that his own back yard had been a fire escape, and his hero Houdini. He rarely lost an opportunity to quote back to us the great escape artist's motto—*Do others or they will do you*—and though he made no effort to explain its veiled meaning, in time we deduced it.

Our parents knew no one on Long Island, and, suspicious of the locals, they had no interest in changing that. We were saved from total isolation thanks only to the fact that our father's sister, Magda, and her husband, Zolly, decided to buy a plot of land down the street, had a house built, and moved in, along with our three cousins. There were then five of us. Our small tribe rode bicycles through the neighborhood, always looking over our shoulders for the kidnapper's ominous black van. We never saw it, but by then we had begun to un-

THE MRI

Again and again, we'll put our shoulder
to the wheel
on which we're broken. Stretched out at the heart
of a replica of the stone
sarcophagus we once believed to "eat flesh,"
we still have a straight

shot at the Strait
of Gibraltar. Where we first found a shoulder
to cry on. Long before the flash
of an iron-rimmed wheel
on a limestone
pavement. Where we first had a little heart

to heart.
Where we first developed our sense of the straight
and narrow. Threw the first stone.
First rubbed shoulders
with pigment traders. First made a color wheel.
First thought to flush

dyes through our own flesh,
so as to map what lies within our hearts.

First reinvented the wheel
that will run straight
only with a camber. First gave the cold shoulder
to a pigment trader. First chipped away at limestone

till it actually looked like stone.
First assigned a shoulder flash
to the Airborne Division. First deigned to shoulder
the blame for what happened in the heart
of Galicia. Long before we learned to lie straight
as a die, though the planets wheel

and wheel
about us. Before we first secured a lodestone
to a merchantman. First entered the home straight
where ore is crushed in the flosh
as the heart
is ofttimes crushed. First put our shoulder

to that great wheel. Saw Anu in the flesh.
First learned that a stone-faced doctor has the heart
to give it to us straight from the shoulder.

—*Paul Muldoon*

derstand that the real criminals weren't the ones who were passing through but the ones we lived among.

For example: The owner of the house that sat at twelve o'clock on the cul-de-sac at the end of our street had borrowed money from the Mafia which he couldn't pay back, and jumped (was forced to jump?) from the window of a Manhattan skyscraper. A few doors in the other direction, Dr. Brosowsky, who'd started out as a pediatrician and overnight become a diet doctor, sold speed—imported from Colombia and administered out of a giant tank—to an endless queue of women; when he was eventually caught and a federal lawsuit was filed against him, he, too, killed himself. Kitty-corner, at No. 9, Mr. Moretti worked for his wife's family in the florist business. One night, he ran across the street to the doctor who lived there, screaming that his wife had fallen down the stairs. By the time the doctor arrived, she was dead. The wife's family didn't believe it was an accident—rope marks were found around her ankles and wrists—and they hired a private detective, who followed Moretti down to Florida and tapped his phone. Soon afterward, he was convicted of murder.

Year after year brought more: On Cornwall Lane, there were two brothers who lived in adjacent houses and were in business with their father; the father, arrested for tax evasion, killed himself, and the sons both went to prison. The guy next door to us was a big-time plumber who did work for the city, and had a sweetheart in the comptroller's office with whom he had a payola scheme, submitting astronomical bills for fixing city toilets and drains for approval with a kickback; he did a stint in prison, and when he got out he stole some large granite slabs from a cemetery in Queens which he used as steps for his swimming pool. There was a doctor on Meadow Lane with two St. Bernards who overbilled to Medicaid and got caught for it. On the same street, there was a man who got into trouble for price-fixing Formica, and, around the corner, on Primrose Lane, one who was a part owner of a ductwork business and drove a Rolls-Royce, and every morning on the way to work in Queens stopped to visit his girlfriend; one day there was a hit-and-run, and it took no time at all for the cops to trace it back to his Rolls. It came out that he'd been funnelling money from the business to the mistress, and he agreed to a plea bargain while the business filed for bankruptcy. Even our dog became briefly criminal: one day he ran off and killed one of the neighbor's cats. The neighbor sued, demanding his execution. All four of us had to appear in court as witnesses in the deposition (the cat was old, and the dog had scared her to death but hadn't actually mauled her), and in the end he was narrowly cleared of the charges, with the warning that the next time he escaped he would be put to sleep.

In other words, criminals were all around us, and this pervasiveness of criminality, its commonplaceness, also entered into our deepest sense of being. It's been said that in any family it takes only two bounces to get to a criminal, but no one needed tell us as much; we knew it through an instinctive grasp of statistics, calculated in the gut. Indeed, there were times when we wondered, stumbling onto our own stores of guilt, whether that criminal was within us. But good and bad, us and them, black and white, all of it became smudged gray with the passage of coastal seasons, and we developed an acceptance of wrongdoing as an inevitable aspect of adult life, or perhaps of life in general. In the woods behind our cousins' house, we played at Godfather; our crimes piled up, as did our debts, our Sicilian messages, our retaliations. In the basement of Aunt Magda and Uncle Zolly's house, we sent one another to sleep with the fishes. And it was down there, one November afternoon, killing ourselves softly in the cedar closet, that we came across the safe.

It was tucked into a recess behind the hems of Aunt Magda's fur coats, and if, after being shot at point-blank range, I had not leaned all the way back to inhale their still pungent animal scent, I wouldn't have knocked the back of my skull against it. The instinct to wail loudly was suppressed when our cousin, crouching down, looked past me into the darkness and let out a low whistle, for what I had nearly concussed myself on was a gunmetal-gray Mosler safe, about two feet tall and eighteen inches wide, with a dial tumbler and a lever.

Very little conversation, perhaps none, was needed for us to arrive at the conclusion that what was locked inside was

not only valuable but also illegal or related to illegal activity. This assumption was based on math—on the readily available numbers against the likelihood of anything aboveboard—and also on what we knew of our uncle's past, which was almost nothing beyond that he had been born in a Polish D.P. camp after the war. To say that he was not talkative would be an understatement: he smoked with what seemed to be the ambition to destroy whatever was left of his raspy voice, and spent his evenings closed up in his study listening to Schubert. Once, during a trip to see our grandparents in Israel, our father had remarked that the whole country was filled with crazy people because it was filled with survivors; that in order to have survived the Holocaust one had to be capable of doing crazy things, and so Israel was, in its way, a kind of mental asylum. Then he told the story of a woman he and our mother had just met for coffee, who, as a seven-year-old, had defended herself against a predator in the camps by hiding the broken end of a bottle in her fist and cutting his face open when he came at her. From this we gleaned that, of our relatives, Uncle Zolly had inherited the greatest capacity for craziness, since his mother had survived for two years in a concentration camp. In other words, Uncle Zolly's transgressions were preordained by the convergence of history and character, and so we were not surprised when, in the days that followed the discovery of the safe in the cedar closet, we turned up, behind some bottles of Alka-Seltzer in his medicine cabinet, two rubber-banded rolls of hundred-dollar bills. It was only when we looked through his sock drawer and found a Colt Python revolver that we began to fear that, like our neighbor who had leaped or been pushed out of the skyscraper window, Uncle Zolly had gotten in too deep. Staring at the gun, with its black grip and its stainless-steel barrel, we tried to imagine what he had done that had necessitated owning one, and who might be after him. From then on, we saw Uncle Zolly in a different light, thinner and limned with impermanence.

We didn't go to our parents. That might be hard to fathom now, when children immediately go to their parents about everything—when there isn't even such a thing as going to one's parents, because we who are now parents are forever there, rarely leaving our children alone for a moment. But, back when we grew up, going to one's parents was like crossing a lake—that was how far away they seemed to us, how remote. And, even if we made the effort to cross it, we couldn't be sure that they would be there when we arrived. They were most likely off somewhere else, they were busy, they were trying to get out of all the things they had gotten into. They had gotten out of the city, but in doing so they had gotten themselves into other things that now needed getting out of, too. And, in any case, the safe, the money, the gun—to admit that we'd found any one of these was to confess to having been up to things we shouldn't have been up to, and to risk our parents' fury. So we didn't go to them. We kept our mouths shut, and tried to figure things out in our own way.

In those days, we read a lot, whatever was around, which was mostly our mother's old paperbacks, whose browned paper crumbled when we turned the pages. We read to get ahead, but not in the way that is meant now when people tell children they ought to read; we read simply to get out of childhood. To read was to arrive at the future more quickly, it was to bypass years, to satisfy a desire for experiences that we were still too young to have, and along the way we learned all sorts of things, both useful and useless. When our mother was around and in a good mood, we could often persuade her



to drive us in the Cadillac to the public library, and it was there, in a book on private investigators with a chapter on safecracking, that we discovered the standard sequence for dial locks: four times to the right for the first number, three times to the left past the first number to the second, two times to the right past the second number to the third, and then to the left for the fourth number.

A meeting was called in the woods. There was snow on the ground, but our cousins arrived wearing sneakers with no socks, because that was how they were: careless, unprepared for everything, and therefore ready for anything. All that was needed now was to figure out the four numbers that meant the most to our uncle. Months, days, years, some combination of meaningful dates. Unless it was part of an old phone number? Or an address where he had once lived? In the weeks that followed, we ducked down to the cedar closet whenever the opportunity arose to try new combinations.

Meanwhile, life continued. Winter dragged on, and, in the course of the next months, our neighborhood was hit by a series of robberies—five houses altogether. A police officer who had a side business mowing lawns on the weekends, ours included, told our parents that the burglars would never go for our house because of its position atop the hill, above the rest of the neighborhood. Plus, not only was it fenced on all sides but there were no woods edging the property, where they could dump the goods and escape on foot to a waiting getaway car should they be pursued. And yet, in the early spring, after the snow melted, we found, at the edge of our garden on an ivy-covered hill that sloped down to the street, a jewelry box that had been emptied and tossed away, its little drawers pulled out and its turquoise wood rotted from water damage.

We also found, one day—at the back of a drawer in Uncle Zolly's study, behind his Pall Malls—a notebook small and thin enough to fit into a shirt breast pocket, with the El Al logo printed on its vinyl cover. We'd checked all the drawers plenty of times, we had found his *Playboys* and *Hustlers*, but we had missed the notebook. Either that or it had only recently been moved there. Inside, on the first page, were a series of passwords, the code to the alarm system, which we recognized, and, below that, a four-digit number.

No one else was home; that goes without saying. We hurried down the steps into the basement and filed into the cedar closet, ideas about what we might find stirring in us as we pushed the pungent fur coats aside and knelt before the safe. Our oldest cousin, selected to do the honors, blew on his fingers, a purely dramatic gesture, because by then we

were practiced enough at the procedure that it took only two tries for the dial to engage and the bolt to retract with a muffled knock. We had imagined many things—in our childish speculation about adult transgression, we had pictured stacks of money, drugs, stolen jewelry, even gold bullion. We had come to accept that Uncle Zolly was criminal in the way of so many: that he operated outside the limits of the permissible because life was an ongoing struggle for survival that one was forever about to lose; that certain versions of morality simply weren't affordable; that life had to be lived defensively, which required a shrewdness that saw a way around or over or through the obstacles, a way to evade the things that were coming to close you down, put you away, even kill you. And yet it had never occurred to us that our uncle, enclosed in his caul of silence, might himself be the aggressor.

Inside the safe was a large blue velvet bag, the kind that our parents kept the kiddush cups in so that they wouldn't get tarnished, or the menorah that remained unused in the sideboard for fifty-one weeks of the year. There was nothing else. Only this blue velvet bag that was printed with the name of a silversmith in Israel, Hazorfim, whose shop we had seen many times in the lobby of the hotel where we stayed in Jerusalem when visiting our grandparents. We gathered around our cousin, who lifted the bag by its drawstrings. When he reached inside, his face took on a look first of bewilderment and then of horror. We pressed closer, breathing heavily, and then not breathing at all, when what he pulled out of the bag was a skull. It was brown and mottled, the eye sockets crusted with dirt, the nasal cavity blackened, the mandible missing altogether.

Though I remember much about those years, I don't remember what words passed between us in the long minutes between our finding the skull and burying it back in the bag—that blue velvet bag meant not for bone but for silver, meant to house what was precious, not what was left after all that had once been precious had departed. This is how the stories we grow up to tell are born: of an effort to explain something that happened to us, until we discover that what we wanted to explain is fundamentally inexplicable, that we have stumbled into a hole in our knowledge, or an absurdity that we mistook for normal and accepted.



In the years that followed, we never spoke of the skull to one another. On that spring afternoon, we returned it to the safe and never mentioned it again. I don't know about the others, but I myself made no real attempt to figure out what it meant, how it had come to be there. The skull existed the way our leaving the city existed, and our house existed, and the fence around it: without an appeal to reason.

Our parents stayed in the house for decades after we grew up and left, free at last, or so we thought, until we learned that there are certain prisons, constructed with the best intentions, for the utmost protection, that one carries with one. When at last they sold the house, it was to a Chinese family who believed that it was auspicious, and asked our father to leave behind whatever "had been there for a long time." When he and our mother drove out through the motorized gate for the last time, I like to think that the screen of the monitor in the kitchen finally went black, but of course it must still have transmitted the idea, one it took us years to refute, if we ever did, that vacancy is the only reliable form of safety.

It wasn't until after the house was sold, and Uncle Zolly was long dead, he himself nothing but a skull in the loam, that we learned the truth. Aunt Magda was moving to a nursing home and, while clearing out her apartment, had found the velvet bag. She gave it to our oldest cousin, who had grown up to become a lawyer and knew his way around the law, and told him to find a place to bury it. And when he asked, at last, what he should make of it, she sighed and with a sad smile said that when Uncle Zolly was a young man, on a trip to somewhere else, he had taken a detour and passed through the Polish village of Łopuchowo, where on the morning of August 25, 1941, the Einsatzkommando had marched all the Jewish men into the forest and massacred them. There, in the shallow earth, Uncle Zolly had found the skull. And, in his fury, in his grief, he had brought it home with him. Appalled at himself, at life, at history, he had not known where to put it to rest, and it had gone on living with them all these years. ♦

BOOKS

DRIVEN AROUND THE BEND

The real cost of our cars.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

"The Honeymooners" (1955-56), the greatest American television comedy, is—to a degree more evident now than then—essentially a series about public transportation in New York. Ralph Kramden (Jackie Gleason) is a New York City bus driver, deeply proud to be so and drawing a salary sufficient to support a nonworking wife in a Brooklyn apartment, not to mention a place in a thriving bowling league and membership in the Loyal Order of Raccoon Lodge. His employer is the Gotham Bus Company, which seems to be the sort of private-public enterprise that, like the I.R.T., built the subways. He and his best friend, Ed Norton (Art Carney), who works in the sewers, make daily use of the subway and bus system, which was designed to whisk the outer-borough working classes into light-industrial Manhattan. Neither the Kramdens nor the Nortons seem to own an automobile. When Ed and Ralph go to Minneapolis for a Raccoons convention, they take a sleeper car on a train.

What's striking is that no one watching in the fifties needed to think about any of this. Public transportation was the self-evident bedrock of working-class life. Yet it was also in the mid-fifties that the hipsters and beatniks and rebels feverishly celebrated the car and the burst of autonomy, even anarchy, it offered to postwar life. In Jack Kerouac's "On the Road," the car was the vehicle of liberty for the bohemian kids of those working-class Brooklynites. Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" pities those "who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on Benzedrine / until the noise of wheels and children brought them low," while dreaming wetly of the glories of the open road, which leads to sex, possibly with an idealized version of Neal Cassady, subsequently memorialized as Kerouac's irresistible Dean Moriarty. Cars are for poets and outlaws, the subway for the intimidated and the enslaved.

Kramden and Norton vs. Kerouac and Ginsberg: today, everything has flipped. Public transit is now the cause of the reforming classes, and the car their villain. The car is the consumer economy on wheels: atomizing, competitive, inhuman—and implicitly racist, hiving people off to segregated communities—while the subway and the train are communal *zendos*. Good people ride bicycles and buses; bad people ride in ever-bigger cars. Capitalism, not Dean Moriarty, is in the front seat.

The history of transportation will always be social history, writ large. Food tastes can change from decade to decade, even from year to year; the history of transportation tends to span half-century intervals, marking whole epochs in consciousness. How we move unites us. The Paris Métro and the New York subway, built at roughly the same time, undergird two cities where people ate and made love in different ways but remained modern, in large part, because they moved rapidly in units. The weary and wary faces of Daumier's people, in his images of "Les Transports en Commun," are still familiar. Any insular New Yorker instantly "gets" Paris and its Métro; it's harder for us to "get" Los Angeles.

Perhaps because transportation histories take place on such a big scale, they tend to be highly moralizing: we can be amused by the small gradations in how we eat, but major alterations in how we move must have, we think, some cause or even conspiracy behind them. And so the history of roads and what runs on them often ignores the tragedies of good intentions and the comedies of unintended consequences that genuinely got them going. People routinely insist, without evidence, that the wide boulevards of Paris were built by Baron Haussmann to prevent revolutionary barricades, even though boulevards were a nearly universal feature of urban development in the later nineteenth century; Philadelphia built them extravagantly, and Kansas City boasted that it had more boulevards than Paris, without any Communards to cannonade. People always maintain, similarly, that the big auto manufacturers killed L.A.'s once efficient public-transit system, leaving the city at the mercy of polluting and gridlocked cars. That this is, at best, a very partial truth does not weaken its claim on our consciousness. Even our local effort to cast "master builder" Robert Moses as a unique culprit in the story of what went wrong in New York—too many expressways and not enough trains—runs into the fact that Moses was essentially executing ideas that nearly all reformers of his era shared; what happened in New York happened in other big Northern cities at the same time. Meanwhile, the preservationist movement that stopped his worst plans is now under fire from the same progressives who used to despise him.

Two new books take up the case against cars, the dominant mode of



RENÉ BURRI / MAGNUM; OPPOSITE: ANTONIO GIOVANNI PINNA

For many Americans, cars are as potent a symbol of freedom as guns are, even if they have similarly destructive consequences.

twentieth-century transportation, from a generally progressive perspective. Daniel Knowles's "Carmageddon" (Abrams), despite its jokey title, is a serious diatribe against cars as agents of social oppression, international inequality, and ecological disaster. Henry Grabar's "Paved Paradise" (Penguin Press) is an anti-parking polemic, with many bits of mordant social history related in a good-natured and at times puckish vein. Both books make an argument for alternatives—rapid transit, trains and trolleys, bicycles—but they spend most of their time damning the current conjuncture.

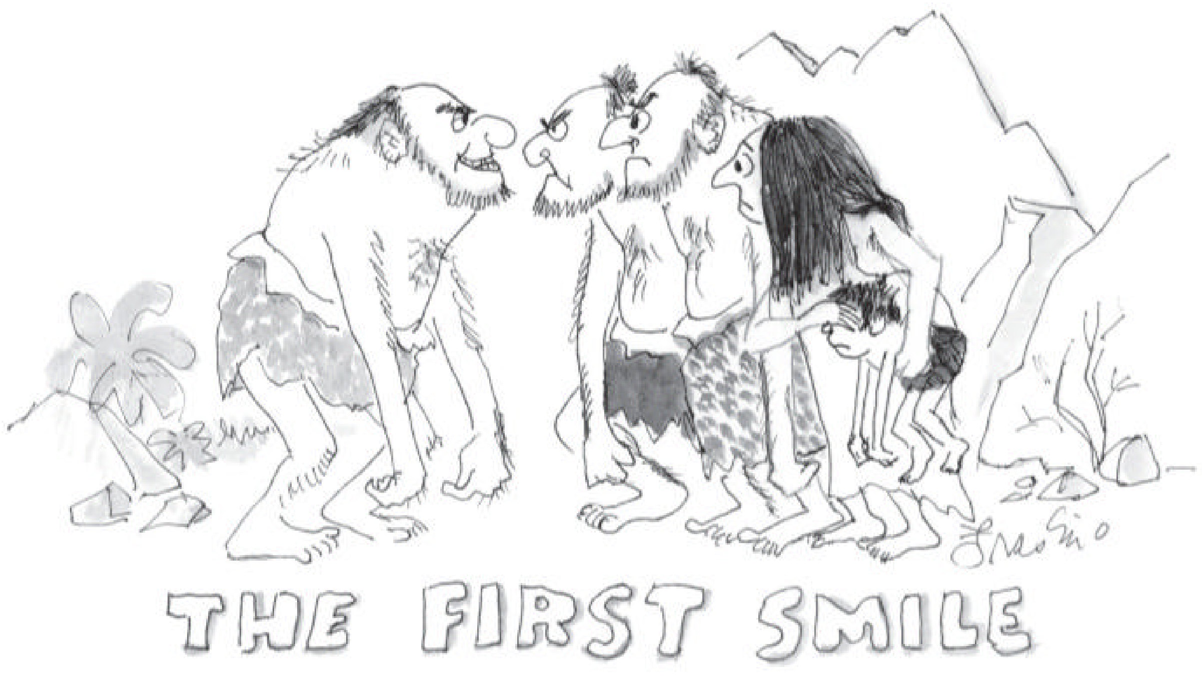
For Knowles, cars are unredeemable instruments of evil. He is a writer for *The Economist*, and his book reads like a series of *Economist* pieces: briskly written, well researched, and with a knack for landing the significant statistic right after the crisply summarized argument. Though he has a few horse-and-buggy narrative mannerisms—he insists on ending a chapter with a paragraph foreshadowing the contents of the next—he is passionate about his subject. Cars are dangerous beyond description, their noxiousness beyond the planet's power to scrub away. America has exported its car addiction to the developing world, where congestion, pollution, and destruction of the urban fabric are even worse than they are here. The swelling metropolises of emerging nations, such as Brazil's São Paulo, are bad mock Los Angeleses, their economies stalled along with their traffic: "A huge amount of economic growth has been squandered, with the extra income that people are earning being spent sitting in traffic on ever-more polluted roads, instead of on actually living better lives."

No remedy seems possible. The electric car is a chimera, producing more pollution in its construction than its existence justifies, and the dream of a driverless car can never be realized. Knowles details the casualties caused by driverless cars, with perhaps too obvious pleasure. (Overreacting to accidents is a bad habit when it comes to new kinds of transportation: the disaster of the Hindenburg helped end dirigible travel, a mostly safe, efficient, and by all accounts exceptionally pleasant means of conveyance. "Oh, the humanity!" an announcer famously moaned as he watched it burn, but humanity would probably have benefitted from more and better blimps.) Still, Knowles is persuasively scathing about the absurdity of Elon Musk's version of a subway—an underground tunnel that sends individual Tesla cars looping through Las Vegas, common train compartments having evidently been judged crime-prone.

Knowles does ride several slightly dated hobbyhorses, often imputing cupidity as an explanation where stupidity alone would do. Jane Jacobs, the enemy of expressways, is given a breathless introduction, and her half-century-old triumph over Robert Moses's plan to build a highway through SoHo is related yet again. But even those of us who think of her as something close to a saint can still recognize that, as with all saints, not everything she believed was true. The West Village she loved was a snapshot taken between economic epochs.

Knowles also blames expressways—he focusses on one that goes through Atlanta—for enforcing the segregation of American life, by separating suburbs and inner cities ever more aggressively. And yet ascribing general transportation schemes to local American evils risks missing the bigger picture. In the postwar period, projects like that were *everywhere*. Paris created its own version with the Pompidou expressway, cutting off the Right Bank from the river, an amputation that ended only last year. Philadelphia got the Delaware Expressway, courtesy of Ed Bacon. As revisionist urban historians have pointed out, the disagreements among urbanists hardly fall along neat political lines; many of the devils in this story, like Bacon and Edward Logue, were the more consciously progressive figures, while the angels were defending stagnant and immobile arrangements that eventually priced out all but the rich—so that Jacobs's beloved Hudson Street, left mainly unaltered in its small-scale charm, has few remaining locksmiths and bakers and is a ghetto of the wealthy.

Progressive urban planners genuinely believed, in a period of panic about the death of cities, that their renewal depended on up-to-date infrastructure. The sensibilities that, in the nineteen-seventies, tore down beautiful old Shibe Park, in North Philadelphia, and moved the Phillies to the soulless Veterans Stadium considered the move an obvious improvement. That the electric trolleys being abandoned in Philadelphia were greener and more efficient was not an insight available to that time. We need not find cloaked and sinister reasons for our ancestors' bad decisions, when ignorance and shortsightedness—the kind we, too, suffer from, invisible to us—will do just fine.



The great architectural historian Reyner Banham even made the case, back in the nineteen-sixties, that those cities, like Los Angeles, which built themselves around automobiles instead of streetcars and subways actually benefitted by being less "monocentric." (Europeans are still startled to see, in movies like "Training Day," that in L.A. gang members live in big houses.) The downtown-centered city that we yearn for is, perhaps, an archaic model, and Americans have voted against it with their feet or at least with their accelerators. Those of us who live in and love New York have a hard time with this argument, but it is not with-

out merit. Los Angeles is a different kind of city producing a different kind of civilization, and its symbol, that vast horizontal network of lights dotting the hills in the night, is as affectionately viewed as its polar opposite, the vertical rise of the New York skyline.

Grabar's book, though smaller in the scope of its indictment, is more entertaining in the specificity of its indignation. In the mono-causal genre that flourished in the nineties, we got the little-thing-that-changed-the-world book (longitude, cod); our grimmer decade now offers the simple-thing-that-ruined-it-all book (sugar, parking). Grabar is earnest in his view that parking is a grave social problem, but his book is of necessity consistently entertaining and often downright funny. Although it is possible to make parking into a serious subject, it is impossible to make it a solemn one. The humorless French philosopher Henri Bergson insisted that comedy occurs when something organic is transposed into something mechanical, and that seems to be the case here: a stomping, hat-throwing fury is directed at a stationary metal box.

Grabar has a journalist's essential gift for making a story out of people, not propositions. He fills his book with engaging eccentrics, including the Serena Williams of New York "traffic agents," Ana Russi, who once gave out a hundred and thirty-five parking tickets in a day. Yet he has a tale to tell. The need for a place to put internal-combustion vehicles when they weren't being operated followed closely on their invention. A question comes inevitably to mind: Where had they parked the horses? In fact, stabling was a huge nineteenth-century problem, because horses produced effluents, in steaming, fly-ridden piles, and had to be fed. (The exhausting intensity, not to mention the insalubriousness, of a horse-pulled culture is hard to recapture.) When horseless carriages took their place, Grabar says, the civil-minded assumption in America was that private developers should be obliged to provide sufficient parking to accompany whatever building they had just built. "The idea of parking minimums, proposed in the twenties, rolled out in the thirties, and expanded nationwide in the forties and fifties, was obviously enticing: cities could force the private sector to fix the parking problem," he explains.

These minimums were consolidated in the *Parking Generation Manual*, a single volume that has had monumental effects on the quality of American life. Though first officially published in 1985, the manual codified more than half a century's practice into a set of fixed injunctions: so many parking spaces required for each building type. These calculations could be fantastically minute. "Parking requirements for funeral parlours were determined based on some combination of fourteen different characteristics, from the number of hearses to the number of families who lived on the premises," Grabar reports. Rules got drawn up and were almost universally accepted—because the logic seemed impeccable and because no one goes to planning meetings to dispute such things except other planners.

A paradox was quickly felt. The system, reinforced by the powerful Institute of Transportation Engineers, created a permanent logjam, in which huge quantities of urban space were devoured by parking. Architects and developers were constrained from building well, since the parking they had to supply dictated the form their buildings could take. The classic main street of little stores crowded one next to another became impossible to re-create; every store had to be surrounded by the moat of a parking lot. "Mostly, America just stopped building small buildings," Grabar writes. "Parking requirements helped trigger an extinction-level event for bite-sized, infill apartment buildings like row houses, brownstones, and triple-deckers." Intended to insure that parking was paid for by the private sector, the system instead swallowed up vast tracts of what ought to have been public and pedestrian space. The American town lost its heart, became strip-malled and overrun, because the street front had been consumed by places to put the cars that brought you there. It was the nineteenth-century manure problem—only with sterile spaces rather than smelly piles.

Fortunately, Grabar's story of bad parking has a good-parking hero: Donald Shoup, a U.C.L.A. engineer, who is celebrated by a Facebook group with many thousands of members. What made him a hero was a series of papers, eventually turned into a fat 2005 volume called "The High Cost of Free Parking," showing that the parking minimums were based on a fantasy about how and why people drove in the first place, and that, rather than ending the congestion, the minimums were producing it. The answer to the problem lay in market forces—pricing parking at its true cost, and making the parker, not the public, pay for it.

Shoup led a movement that, among other things, helped bring the parking meter back to many cities that had long abandoned it as a relic of an earlier age and a deterrent to business. The burden of paying for parking was now on the auto owner, a concept that met great resistance. Conservatives see parking as liberals see health care—as a right, to be underwritten by the state. Indeed, the idea of putting a market price on parking your car is somehow viewed as outrageously confiscatory among those who would like to put a market price on everything else. And so, in the classic American manner, the parking meter, like the face mask, became a fetishized symbolic object. In certain rural states, the fight against parking meters takes on an obsessive quality, documented by one academic study with the matchless title "Park Free or Die: Rural Consciousness, Preemption, and the Perennial North Dakota Parking-Meter Debate."

Shoup's most forceful advice was simply not to think much about parking—to build without brooding over where people would park their cars. Just as a mere Band-Aid often does help heal a wound, ignoring a problem sometimes does make it go away. Grabar gives the example of downtown Los Angeles; it had long been abandoned because the parking spaces necessary to build couldn't be found, but it returned to life when mandates for making commercial spaces residential were removed, in 1999. In the first two decades of this century, the downtown population more than tripled.

The fact that new buildings didn't come with parking spaces meant that people had to search to find one, and they did. In truth, Grabar never fully explains—and I have read his chapter three times, sure that I'm missing something—what the downtown-L.A. crowd

does with its cars. (Nobody in Los Angeles except a truly quixotic bicyclist can survive without one.) The answer seems to be that Angelenos now do what New Yorkers have always done: scrounge around for slots in available if not adjacent parking garages, search for serendipitously vacated spaces. It is another form of pricing; an unease in finding parking creates a greater ease in living life.

Must we end the automobile? I come before the court trying the case of its extinction as someone who has never owned a car—who never even drove one until recently, and then only for a few weeks a year—and has ridden the 6 train daily for most of the past four decades. Nonetheless, the argument for the car, like the argument for homeownership, resides simply in its appeal, an appeal already apparent to the majority of people on the planet. It is not only that the car provides autonomy; it provides privacy. Cars are confession booths, music studios, bedrooms. It is significant that the best song about travelling in cars is called "No Particular Place to Go." We pay an enormous price for our automotive addiction—in congestion, time wasted, neighborhoods destroyed, emissions pumped out, pleasant streets subordinated to brutal expressways—but telling the addict that the drug isn't actually pleasurable is a losing game. There is some slight hope in saying that it isn't healthy, and that the replacement for the drug is about as good. But understanding this emotional infrastructure in favor of cars is vital to imagining their possible replacement.

The grip of the car as a metaphor for liberty is as firm as that of guns, if perhaps with similarly destructive results. Consider the paranoia unleashed when urban planners recently disseminated the benevolent idea of the "fifteen-minute city." The model is based on places such as New York and Paris, where most goods, from groceries to haircuts, can indeed be found within a fifteen-minute walk of your home—in many New York neighborhoods, it's closer to five, and in some Paris neighborhoods closer to two. Yet its enemies decried an anti-car conspiracy led by statists who wanted to force citizens into tiny, concentration-camp-like areas from which they would have no exit. The French academic Carlos Moreno, the most recent proponent of the fifteen-minute ideal, has had to deny being in any way anti-car. (He *is* anti-car, but in a gentle, vehicle-reducing manner, not a vehicle-eliminating one.)

One can recall even such a professionally patrician conservative as George F. Will insisting that "the real reason for progressives' passion for trains is their goal of diminishing Americans' individualism," while "automobiles encourage people to think they—unsupervised, untutored, and unscripted—are masters of their fates." In England, by contrast, conservative opinion has typically swung the other way, with the great conservative poet Philip Larkin (to whom Will has properly genuflected on other occasions) having had his crucial "Whitsun Weddings" epiphany on a train. Indeed, so powerfully associated is Larkin with the railroad that there has been a Larkin special on British Rail. And John Betjeman, the other great British conservative nationalist poet, was even more fanatic in his devotion to railroads and in his hatred of motorways. The commitment to one conveyance rather than another appears to be a matter less of reason than of familiarity and nostalgia.

In this country, what seems to be missing from arguments for better and more public transit is the passionate constituency aroused by cars and by bicycles. (Jody Rosen, in his lovely chronicle "Two Wheels Good," details how the bicycle has been treated, historically, as a self-propelled engine of grace.) Everyone agrees that it would be great to have a fast train from Los Angeles to San Francisco, but people won't reshape their lives to make it happen. Irrational passion is the fuel of realistic politics, and few people feel passionate about public transportation. Any innocent who dives into high-speed-rail issues discovers that every opposing argument has something to be said for it: the country is too large; our tax structure is too weak; it could work only if there was less permitting; it could work only if we had a European-style social democracy.

Ultimately, the cultural climate counts most. In less than twenty years, Wi-Fi went from an oddity to a felt necessity. People mostly don't feel that way about trains or light rail. We would like to have a faster, more efficient rail service from New York to Boston—but, if we have to settle for Chinatown buses and car pools and shuttle planes, we'll manage. The fact that it takes six hours to get from Baltimore to Boston, when a faster train can cover the longer distance between Paris and Marseille in four, does not move us to protest the obvious failure of ambition.

A civilization can't hide its values from itself. Every argument about the impossibility of building public transit—fast trains or electric buses or light rail—could have been made about building the New York City subway more than a century ago. The difference is that New Yorkers all wanted the subway. Trains were their Wi-Fi. A 1904 report in the *Times* on the development of the new subway bore the subhead "FEW ACCIDENTS IN SUBWAY," and boasted that there had been few "very serious accidents," then blithely mentioned a tunnel collapse in which ten men were killed and an explosion that cost the lives of six workers. It seems safe to say that if sixteen people had been killed in a driverless-car experiment—or, for that matter, in the development of our mostly completed Second Avenue subway—the project would have been taken off-line.

Archie Bunker, the bigoted, growling antihero of the TV series "All in the Family," which began in 1971, is basically Ralph Kramden fifteen years on, having moved to a row house in Queens—historically underserviced by the subway, in part because the bridges to Queens mostly don't have train tracks, and in part because of dastardly Moses—and having moved from the overabundant Eisenhower years to the paranoid Nixon era. Now he is overcome by nostalgia, voiced in the show's opening song, for the old LaSalle sedan and how great it ran. Human beings are meaning machines, searching for symbolic attachments and rewriting their own fables in retrospect. The rear-view mirror is as powerful an instrument of transportation as the accelerator. We can't help looking backward as we go forward. It's how trips begin, and accidents happen. ♦

BOOKS

RECKLESS DISREGARD

Do our media-friendly defamation rules hurt our democracy?

BY JEANNIE SUK GERSEN



In the early years of our country, public men who felt maligned could end up killing over it. The duel that resulted in Alexander Hamilton's death was prompted by a letter, in the Albany *Register*, by someone claiming that Hamilton had called Aaron Burr "a dangerous man, and one who ought not to be trusted with the reins of the government," and had expressed a "still more despicable opinion" (without further specifics). Instead of redressing an insult to honor through violence, Burr could have tried to sue under the law of defamation—the legal system's attempt to channel retaliation into a court process. He was certainly familiar with it; as a lawyer, he had used it to go after critics. One probable reason he didn't was that it was undignified for a gentleman to take a social equal to court.

In the decades that followed, putative defamers became more likely to pay for their words with money than with their lives. Only in the past sixty years, though, did the legal balance shift strongly in their favor: wrecking reputations has, under civil law, become much less risky. The media, for the most part, have been free to publish about public figures without great fear of legal repercussions. That protection derives from New York Times v. Sullivan, a 1964 Supreme Court decision that made it harder to win defamation suits against the media. The Court had argued that the press in a democracy must be able to criticize government officials, and the landmark decision is widely seen as indispensable to a free press.

Accordingly, many people have become alarmed at the prospect that a conservative Supreme Court might reconsider it, something that two Justices have proposed. And yet, as became clear during the legal clash between Dominion Voting Systems and Fox News, liberals themselves have conflicting intuitions on the topic. Certainly, the free-for-all of misinformation that culminated in the January 6th attack has complicated easy old-school rhetoric about unfettered speech and democracy. So it's worth asking how the sixty-year-old precedent holds up and in what form it should survive in the twenty-first century.

The Warren Court's expansion of civil rights and civil liberties sometimes occurred in cases where the Court's concern with race discrimination in America was subtext. But, in the case behind New York Times v. Sullivan, race discrimination was overtly at issue. A new book, "Actual Malice" (California), by Samantha Barbas, a law professor and historian, unfurls the story of the case and reminds readers that the triumph of press freedom was an outgrowth of the civil-rights struggle. Versions of the story have been told before, perhaps most famously in Anthony Lewis's "Make No Law," more than three decades ago. Yet Barbas deftly employs archival sources—notably from the *Times*, from the Martin Luther King, Jr., papers, and from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—to shed new light. Her book illuminates the effect of libel suits on journalists' ability to cover the movement, the legal strategies used against those suits, and the impact of the case on the civil-rights movement itself. A heroic narrative in which the litigation helped vanquish segregationists serves to underscore what Barbas calls the "centrality of freedom of speech to democracy."

When the case arose, it was relatively easy to sue the media for defamation. In most states, libel law was weighted heavily against newspapers, even in circumstances where the falsehood was an honest mistake or merely an exaggerated

Our political arena is filled with lies, but few liars are held to account.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAVIER JAÉN

opinion. Henry Ford won a libel claim against the Chicago *Tribune* after it called him an "ignorant idealist" and an "anarchist"; Theodore Roosevelt prevailed against a newspaper from Ishpeming, Michigan, that maintained, "He gets drunk . . . not infrequently." Through the mid-twentieth century, newspapers responded to the peril of libel suits by becoming more attentive to factual accuracy in their reporting. The volume of libel suits declined and settled down.

Then the *Times* began covering the civil-rights movement. After Brown v. Board of Education, newspaper articles reporting on the Southern campaign of resistance to desegregation—including the mobbing of Black students attempting to integrate schools, the acquittal of Emmett Till's killers, and brutal acts of official violence against civil-rights activists—provoked retaliation by segregationists, who felt vilified by the Northern press. The targeting of journalists covering the struggle started with reporters' having eggs thrown at them and evolved into a full-blown, coördinated legal strategy—the "libel attack"—in which lawsuits in state courts were used to drive Northern media out of the South. It was in this context that Montgomery officials filed a libel suit against the *Times* in Alabama courts.

The statements at issue appeared not in a news article but in a full-page ad taken out in 1960 by a committee raising money for King's legal defense. (State officials in Alabama, aiming to take him down, had accused him of falsifying tax returns and, in a prosecutorial novelty, charged him with perjury.) The ad, headed "Heed Their Rising Voices," described how "thousands of Southern Negro students are engaged in widespread non-violent demonstrations," and went on:

> In Montgomery, Alabama, after students sang "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" on the State Capitol steps, their leaders were expelled from school, and truckloads of police armed with shotguns and tear-gas ringed the Alabama State College Campus. When the entire student body protested to state authorities by refusing to re-register, their dining hall was padlocked in an attempt to starve them into submission.

Reporting that King had been arrested seven times, it urged readers to support "with your dollars" his defense as well as the defense of "the embattled students—and the struggle for the right-to-vote."

Many details in the ad were factually inaccurate. The Montgomery police hadn't "ringed" the campus; the song was not "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" but "The Star-Spangled Banner"; student leaders were expelled not for singing it in a demonstration but for a lunch-counter sit-in; the "entire" student body did not refuse to re-register; the dining hall was not padlocked; there was no attempt to starve the students into submission; and King was arrested four times, not seven. Even the list of signatories was off: it included twenty Black ministers associated with the S.C.L.C., King's organization, without their knowledge or consent.

The errors exposed the *Times* to a libel suit that seemed an easy win for Montgomery officials, including L. B. Sullivan, a commissioner whose remit included the police. In coördination with other libel suits in Alabama, the goal was to destroy the S.C.L.C. (several unsuspecting S.C.L.C. ministers named in the ad were also accused of defamation), to topple the *Times*, and to discourage newspapers from reporting sympathetically on civil rights in the South. During much of the ensuing litigation, which stretched from 1960 until the Supreme Court decision in 1964, the threat of libel suits was so substantial that the *Times* ordered its reporters to stay out of Alabama.

The Montgomery circuit-court judge who presided over the trial, with a jury of twelve white men, was a leader of his state's efforts against desegregation. He enforced a segregated courtroom, in which some prospective jurors came dressed in Confederate uniforms. He used "Mr." to address white lawyers but not Black lawyers, and declared that the trial would be ruled by "white man's justice . . . brought over to this country by the Anglo-Saxon Race." Sullivan was awarded five hundred thousand dollars in damages (equivalent to some five million dollars today) and prevailed when the case was appealed to Alabama's highest court, which was also a stronghold of white supremacy.

Around this time, Justice Hugo Black, who was from Alabama and had once joined the Ku Klux Klan but was now among the Court's most liberal Justices, gave a surprising speech about libel and the First Amendment. Employing a formalist, literalist, even absolutist approach to the Constitution, he read the First Amendment as reflecting the Framers' intent to rid the United States of defamation law; false and reputation-damaging statements were constitutionally protected.

Likely taking a cue from Black's remarks, the lawyer who represented the *Times* before the Supreme Court, the Columbia Law School professor Herbert Wechsler, brilliantly reframed the case's significance. To the extent that it was about an error-riddled ad that allegedly damaged people's reputations—essentially, a personal-injury case—it was bound to be a loser. Instead, Wechsler transformed the matter into a lofty reflection on democracy and press freedom; a democracy required a well-informed electorate and could not function, he argued, if citizens feared being penalized for criticizing government officials.

The Supreme Court unanimously found in favor of the *Times*. Its opinion, by Justice William J. Brennan, said that the First Amendment prohibited holding a speaker liable for a false statement about a public figure, unless he made it with "actual malice"—which was defined as knowledge of, or reckless disregard of, the statement's falsity. For the very first time, the Court recognized that First Amendment rights could curb traditional rules that regulated defamatory speech.

The opinion asserted "a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials." Truth was not a requirement for speech protected by the First Amendment, the Court said. "A rule compelling the critic of official conduct to guarantee the truth of all his factual assertions" would lead to "self-censorship."

In the following decades, the Court expanded the Sullivan rule. In 1967, Curtis Publishing Company v. Butts applied "actual malice" to public figures beyond officials. In 1968, St. Amant v. Thompson held that a failure to try to verify inflammatory charges does not necessarily constitute reckless disregard. The Court did not dispute the objection that "such a test puts a premium

on ignorance, encourages the irresponsible publisher not to inquire, and permits the issue to be determined by the defendant's testimony that he published the statement in good faith and unaware of its probable falsity." Still, it concluded that "neither the defense of truth nor the standard of ordinary care" would "adequately implement First Amendment policies."

Meanwhile, the definition of a "public figure" grew expansive. Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc., in 1974, held that a private person could become a public figure if he "voluntarily injects himself" into a public controversy or even if he is involuntarily "drawn into" one. In time, it became easier to assert that a plaintiff counted as a public figure, giving the Sullivan standard a wide reach. Its approach toward speech deemed of public concern was, in turn, so influential that it arguably spread beyond defamation to impose restrictions on civil suits claiming intentional infliction of emotional distress; in 2011 a military father lost a case against anti-gay protesters picketing outside his son's funeral.

The press tends to take for granted that New York Times v. Sullivan is necessary for democracy. But is it? On the one hand, Sullivan still allows deep-pocketed litigants to target truthtellers who lack assets, tying them up in procedural hurdles that effectively chill speech. On the other hand, the Sullivan doctrine (encompassing the 1964 case and succeeding ones that expanded its purview) has made it largely permissible to disseminate falsehoods about an enormous range of people and entities, as long as the speaker, writer, or publisher didn't know that the statement was false or didn't harbor serious doubts about its accuracy, so as to display "reckless disregard" for the truth. What's more, the "reckless disregard" test involves inquiry into a defendant's state of mind: it's seldom easy to establish that a falsehood wasn't spread in the sincere belief that it was true. The case effectively permits the publication of negligently false statements about public figures, very broadly defined, in the name of protecting the debate and criticism needed to make a democracy work.

Recently, the doctrine's critics on the Court have been making themselves heard. Three times in the past four years, as the Court refused to hear cases that could have prompted a reconsideration of New York Times v. Sullivan, Justice Clarence Thomas responded by flatly condemning the ruling. The first was in a case that, after #MeToo, has become a standard type of defamation suit: a woman accused Bill Cosby of rape, his lawyer called her dishonest, and she sued Cosby for defamation. Thomas disparaged Sullivan and its progeny as "policy-driven decisions masquerading as constitutional law," because making a plaintiff prove that a defendant had a reckless disregard for the truth is inconsistent with the founding-era common law of libel, which lacked a "heightened liability standard" and often presumed the defendant's malice. In another case, Thomas asserted that the common law traditionally treated lies about public figures as more troubling than lies about ordinary people, and so—inverting the logic of Sullivan—public figures may deserve more protection, not less. (He cited the "Pizzagate" conspiracy theory as an example of a hurtful falsehood.)



It doesn't seem a stretch to wonder whether Thomas's stormy confirmation, featuring sexual-harassment accusations that he denied and that forever harmed his reputation, has led him to approach defamation law with sympathy for those who feel defamed. As a Presidential candidate, Donald Trump, aggrieved by mainstream media's reporting on his misdeeds, promised to "open up" the libel laws, which he called "impotent" and "unfair." Trump's crusade continued during his Presidency; he described libel laws as "a sham and a disgrace." He also appointed at least one Justice who is skeptical of Sullivan: Neil Gorsuch.

Where Thomas's objections are originalist and historical in nature, Gorsuch's tend toward the empirical. He observes that "our Nation's media landscape has shifted in ways few could have foreseen," with misinformation thriving amid the shuttering of newspapers, the decline of network news, the rise of online media, and the fading of robust fact-checking norms. Because "everyone carries a soapbox in their hands," he thinks, dissenting views wouldn't be squelched by lessening constitutional protection for false statements. The definition of "public figure," meanwhile, has become so expansive that, he writes, private citizens "can become 'public figures' on social media overnight." For all these reasons, he has suggested, the 1964 ruling is ill matched to the modern media environment. Gorsuch has called the case an "ironclad subsidy for the publications of falsehoods by means and on a scale previously unimaginable."

It's not just conservative Justices who have raised such doubts. When Elena Kagan was a law professor in the nineteen-nineties, she wrote a review of Lewis's "Make No Law" in which she wondered whether the Sullivan doctrine had been extended too far. She didn't advocate overturning it, but she noted the "obvious dark side"—that the decision "allows grievous reputational injury to occur without monetary compensation or any other effective remedy"—and suggested that the rule of the case should be more closely limited to its facts. "Is uninhibited defamatory comment an unambiguous social good?" she asked. "That is, does it truly enhance public discourse?" Diminishing the threat of libel suits "promotes not only true but also false statements of fact—statements that may themselves distort public debate." In this respect, she ventured, "the legal standard adopted in *Sullivan* may cut against the very values underlying the decision."

Three decades after Kagan expressed these concerns, people on the left and the right can reasonably ask whether New York Times v. Sullivan has eased the proliferation of misinformation that blights civic discourse and impairs the functioning of our democracy. It's hard to imagine that it is utterly unrelated to the spreading of big lies, including stories that erode trust in elections and lead to events like January 6th. Conservatives may criticize Sullivan because of their distrust of mainstream media and their belief in a Big Tech bias against right-wing speech. Yet even liberals who champion the case fret over the publication of pernicious and unchecked untruths about our democracy. A few actually criticize the Sullivan doctrine, though often in whispers, fearing blowback from

their political kin. After Marc Elias, a Democratic election lawyer, suggested on Twitter last year that the Court should revisit the case, an outcry ensued and he deleted the tweet.

The arrival of the #MeToo movement illustrates a cross-partisan realignment around defamation; it's notable that Justice Thomas's recent fusillade on the issue began with a sexual-assault complainant who found herself accused of lying and sought legal redress. When the statute of limitations for sexual misconduct has expired, an alleged perpetrator who impugns an accuser's honesty can renew a victim's opportunity to sue, albeit for defamation rather than for the underlying misconduct. After New York temporarily suspended the statute of limitations on old sexual-assault cases, E. Jean Carroll was able to sue Donald Trump for battery as well as for defamation; he had called her allegations a "hoax." (The jury recently found Trump liable for five million dollars in damages for sexually abusing and defaming Carroll.) Of course, those on the other side of #MeToo disputes are wielding defamation law, as well, with accused individuals seeking to establish their innocence by suing accusers for defaming them. Despite the occasional high-profile success, though, the current legal milieu tells potential plaintiffs that clearing their name through a defamation suit will be a rocky and uphill path.

Defamation liability is an especially vexed issue when it comes to spreading falsehoods that undermine the functioning of our democracy—perhaps by impugning the legitimacy of democratic elections. And so the contemporary test of our faith in New York Times v. Sullivan has come in the form of lawsuits involving lies about the 2020 Presidential election. Dominion and the voting-technology company Smartmatic each sued Fox News for defamation for airing claims that the companies' machines were used in the perpetration of fraud that stole the election from its rightful winner. Fox loftily claimed that "the core of this case remains about freedom of the press and freedom of speech, which are fundamental rights afforded by the Constitution and protected by New York Times v. Sullivan." Dominion, for its part, argued that "if this case does not rise to the level of defamation by a broadcaster, then nothing does."

And Dominion got extraordinarily lucky in its discovery process: it unearthed clear evidence that Fox hosts and executives thought that the claims were false yet continued to air them in order to maintain viewer ratings. This may well have been that rare case in which a plaintiff suing a media company could have cleared the high hurdle of proving "actual malice"; on the verge of a trial, Fox settled the Dominion case for nearly eight hundred million dollars. Yet what's striking about the Fox e-mails and texts is that they convey a great deal of anxiety about losing viewership—and seemingly no anxiety about legal exposure.

Dominion and Smartmatic have also sued the conservative media outlets OAN and Newsmax. These cases may fail, however, if they don't have the kind of smoking-gun evidence that emerged in the case against Fox. Newsmax, even today, says that it "stands by its coverage," and it has called the ongoing Dominion suit an effort to "undermine a free press." Meanwhile, liberals who cheered on the Dominion suit were reluctant to acknowledge that Sullivan was its biggest obstacle—that they were arguably aligned with those, like Trump, who want to weaken Sullivan. (An MSNBC headline: "Dominion's defamation suit is moving forward. That's good for democracy.") It's telling that a Florida bill designed to challenge the Sullivan doctrine and make it easier for public figures to sue for defamation—a bill championed by Governor Ron DeSantis—has recently been pronounced dead, after protests from conservatives who feared that the right-wing media would fall victim to it, too.

For the most principled, die-hard adherents of Sullivan, the imposition of liability, even on Fox News for election lies, raises worries about a more general chill on reporting. The media columnist Steve Roberts, for instance, has written that when Fox News's lawyers "argue that a defeat in the Dominion case 'would have grave consequences for journalism across this country,' anyone who cares about a free and unfettered press should take that warning very seriously."

But is the Sullivan doctrine, in its current form, really the best we can do? Consider what happened to Shaye Moss and her mother, Ruby Freeman, who were election workers in Georgia in 2020. Members of Trump's camp, including Rudy Giuliani, promulgated the bogus story that the two Black women, working at a ballot center, had hidden suitcases full of fake Biden ballots under a table and added their contents to the vote count late at night, when election observers had left. Then the Gateway Pundit—a far-right site that, according to the analytics service Similarweb, enjoyed a post-election traffic surge that brought its page views to more than three hundred million by the year's end—repeatedly served up versions of the story, despite the fact that it had been forcefully debunked, including by Georgia's secretary of state. A typical headline: "What's Up, Ruby? . . . BREAKING: Crooked Operative Filmed Pulling Out Suitcases of Ballots in Georgia IS IDENTIFIED." The article not only featured seven photographs of Freeman but named her place of business. The women were inundated with threats and went into hiding; their lives were effectively shattered by a smear campaign. They are suing the proprietor of the Gateway Pundit, Jim Hoft, for defamation and emotional distress.

The Sullivan doctrine leaves it far from obvious, though, that they were defamed. According to the defendant, Moss and Freeman were "limited purpose public figures"—by their very efforts to contest the falsehoods the Gateway Pundit helped spread, they had, in the legal adage, stepped into the spotlight—and so must prove actual malice. Hoft denies having knowingly or recklessly spread false stories about the plaintiffs, and, without access to his state of mind, the plaintiffs' lawyers may struggle to prove otherwise. The Sullivan doctrine has allowed people to perpetrate a fraud with impunity when they have made no effort to verify the facts.

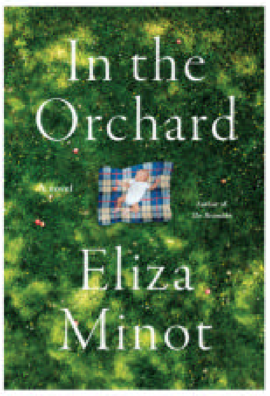
Our political culture is now strewn with lies; the Washington *Post* fecklessly awards Pinocchios, but few liars are truly held to account. And though castigating political actors is part of the rough and tumble of the public arena, lies about them are peculiarly damaging to the commonweal. Morally, Hoft's defense may be preposterous; legally, it is all too plausible. Contemplating future media-stoked "stop the steal" campaigns, we ought to consider whether

Elena Kagan had a point. What if democracy would be better served by narrowing the purview of New York Times v. Sullivan, reducing the culture of impunity, and encouraging media outlets to be more responsible about the facts they purvey?

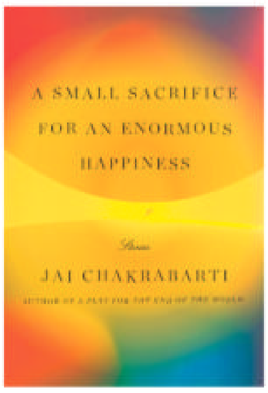
In truth, stricter defamation laws won't save us, either. In the first several decades of our Republic, an era during which libel plaintiffs routinely prevailed in court (when they didn't resort to pistols), newspapers—operating mainly as organs of political parties—were positively littered with libel. Today, the U.K. maintains a relatively plaintiff-friendly approach to defamation, making it a fine venue for libel-suit tourists, and yet the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* are not notable for their fair-minded coverage of controversial matters. Many forms of misinformation (the claim that COVID is a hoax, say, or that the election was rigged) don't take the form of defamation. And plenty of the most inflammatory and misleading things that Fox News reports are not even strictly untrue. The Dominion settlement might make Fox News more cautious about airing certain dubious claims; it will not make the channel, as its discarded motto once declared, fair and balanced.

It's still possible to ask whether we could do a little better—whether thoughtfully recalibrating the Sullivan doctrine could result in at least incremental improvement, by helping the law recognize the importance of truth to democracy. The actual-malice standard defeated worthy plaintiffs even when Sullivan was delivered: a Washington State legislator lost his seat after an unscrupulous red-baiting campaign against him, won a libel suit in 1964, and then saw the win reversed after the Sullivan decision, because he hadn't proved "actual malice." Six decades later, history has delivered a verdict of its own about the danger posed by the negligent publication of falsehoods. In the project of legal reform, thought precedes action—sometimes by generations—which is why reimagining defamation law should not be left as a conservative monopoly. When it comes to protecting public discourse amid technological transformation, a healthy polity can't give up on fine-tuning the ground rules. Democracy dies in defeatism. ♦

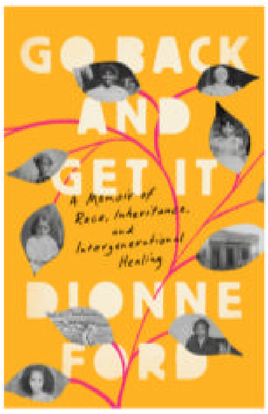
BRIEFLY NOTED



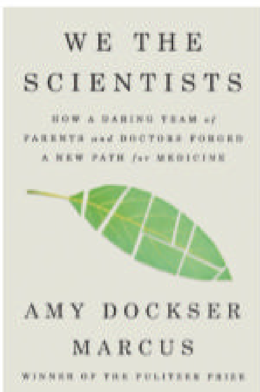
In the Orchard, *by Eliza Minot (Knopf).* This novel, an examination of motherhood, unfolds in the course of a night and a day. Maisie, weeks after having her fourth child, lies awake breastfeeding and fretting about money. Her hormonal, sleep-deprived thoughts veer from the banal to the profound: "She couldn't get purchase anywhere, couldn't get traction on anything." The next morning, her family makes its annual visit to a local apple orchard. There, a succession of encounters reminds her of the punishing unpredictability of human existence. Maisie's contemplation of life as "a series of languishments and flourishes, of withering and blooming," aptly describes this rhapsodic, plotless book, which nevertheless carries a stinging twist at its end.



A Small Sacrifice for an Enormous Happiness, *by Jai Chakrabarti (Knopf).* The fifteen stories in this collection, set variously in America and India, are propelled by familial anxieties. Chakrabarti's characters—diverse in race, class, sexuality, and religion—reveal themselves through longings: a closeted man dreams of conceiving a child with his lover's wife; a lonely married woman secretly builds an airplane in her garage. Elsewhere, would-be do-gooders turn exploitative, as in a story that finds an American man making wild financial promises to the son of his longtime guru. These tales eschew neat conclusions, leaving their protagonists suspended, as one opines of life itself, "between unbearable truths—salvation or suffering."



Go Back and Get It, *by Dionne Ford (Bold Type).* On her thirty-eighth birthday, the author of this memoir found a century-old photograph of an enslaved ancestor and embarked on a pilgrimage to uncover hidden branches of her family tree. The book's title is derived from the West African practice of *sankofa*, which is "symbolized by a bird in flight with its head craned backward and an egg in its beak." In spare, often haunting prose, Ford describes the union between her Black great-great-grandmother and her white great-great-grandfather, the lasting trauma of being raped as a child by a relative, and the lynching of forebears "swinging from trees for the crime of being born Black."



We the Scientists, *by Amy Dockser Marcus (Riverhead).* Niemann-Pick disease type C is a rare genetic disorder whose sufferers face almost certain death by the age of twenty. In a selection of case histories, this book illuminates the painful tension between the extended time frames of medical research and the life spans of those hoping for a cure. Marcus writes of a woman whose twin girls received an NPC diagnosis as toddlers. When the mother sought permission through the F.D.A.'s compassionate-use program to give the girls an experimental drug, profound ethical issues arose: What if the treatment made the girls worse? Given the rarity of the disease, might a one-off experiment preclude sufficient enrollment in a later clinical trial, countering the common good? Marcus shows how parents, by imparting a sense of urgency to the search for a cure, have helped future generations of children even as they could not save their own.

ON TELEVISION

DRAMA QUEEN

The "Bridgerton" prequel series "Queen Charlotte," on Netflix.

BY INKOO KANG



"Whales died so I could look like this," seventeen-year-old Charlotte (India Amarteifio) says matter-of-factly to her brother, Adolphus (Tunji Kasim), on their way to London, where she is to marry the king of England. The whalebone corset she's obliged to wear—"rather delicate and also very, very sharp"—has rendered her immobile for the siblings' six-hour stagecoach journey, while her dress, made of two-hundred-year-old lace and encrusted with sapphires, imposes its own restrictions. "I am forced into a ludicrous gown so stylish that, if I move too much," Charlotte continues, "I might be sliced and stabbed to death by my undergarments." She deadpans, "Oh, how joyful it is to be a lady."

Welcome back to the pop-feminist and preposterously pretty world of "Bridgerton," where the sugariness of the eye candy pairs delectably with the show's tart nods toward social inequities. The Netflix series, adapted from Julia Quinn's historical romance novels, has expanded into a franchise with the equally lavish "Queen Charlotte," a prequel spinoff. But the more pleasurable return might be to the theatrical righteousness and politically charged couplings of Shondaland, the production company founded by Shonda Rhimes, the TV powerhouse behind "Grey's Anatomy," "Scandal," and "Inventing Anna." Though Rhimes's imprimatur was all over the marketing campaign for the early iterations of "Bridgerton," she was neither its creator nor a credited writer on any of its episodes. In contrast, five of the six scripts for "Queen Charlotte" bear her name, an almost startling level of participation for the television mogul. There's a distinct Shonda-ness to the dialogue, which recalls "Scandal" 's snippy banter and florid, time-stopping monologues, as well as that series' obsession with optics. Who needs the glowing fairy lights of "Bridgerton" when this more world-weary spectacle boasts so many confident fingerprints?

The spinoff is meant to tell two tales: the story of why Charlotte, an orphan from a small German province, was chosen to wed George III (the tyrant who impelled Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence), and an explanation of how this version of Great Britain came to be a color-blind society that embraces Charlotte, a light-skinned Black European, as their queen. (The belief that the historical Charlotte had Black ancestry is apparently widespread in the U.K., though the theory emerged only in the mid-twentieth century.) When Charlotte first meets Princess Augusta (Michelle Fairley), George's high-handed mother and the power behind the throne, the older white woman inspects the bride-to-be's teeth and hands in an echo of the slave trade. "You did not say she would be *that* brown," Augusta rails at one of her advisers behind closed doors—an allusion to the real-life British royals' alleged concerns over the skin tone of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's progeny. Augusta, realizing that her son's already weak standing would be further undermined by the P.R. mess of a poorly chosen wife, reframes the mistake as a move toward racial equality, and embarks on what she calls "the Great Experiment," a desegregation project that elevates several wealthy families of color into the ranks of the nobility. If, as Harry and Meghan claim, his family sold out the couple by playing into the British public's racism, Rhimes seems to imply that an institution of supposed God-given authority could have done just the opposite.

This counter-history is hardly convincing as a remedy to ingrained prejudice.

The King and Queen's sex life becomes a matter of nationwide consequence.

ILLUSTRATION BY ELEANOR TAYLOR

England is a global power in the show's universe, and the actual British Empire arose largely through the brutal extractions of colonialism and slavery. But this is also an alternate universe where eighteenth-century musicians play twenty-first-century pop hits and the reigning English monarch is toe-curlingly handsome, so let us feel free to exercise some suspension of disbelief.

"Bridgerton"'s first season gave the romance genre an update by deferring the climax until after the wedding; its protagonist, Daphne, fought for her happily ever after with a husband who had, unbeknownst to her, vowed never to have children, to spite his abusive, lineage-fixated father. Charlotte suffers a similar post-nuptial shock. Kept from meeting her future husband until their wedding, Charlotte flees the ceremony hall, until she's found and charmed back by George (Corey Mylchreest) himself. Then, on their wedding night, George takes her to "Buckingham House," where she is to live, alone. He retires to his own palace, in Kew. "This is for the best," he asserts. Charlotte doesn't know what sex is, but she knows that she's supposed to be having it in order to fulfill her purpose in England, where she has no family, a possible adversary in her mother-in-law, and a formality-laden alliance with her secretary, Brimsley (Sam Clemmett)—a closeted gay man who squabbles with his lover, Reynolds (Freddie Dennis), a secretary to the King, over which of the royals is to blame for the sorry state of the marital union.

Whether the King and Queen consummate their marriage quickly becomes a matter of nationwide consequence. If the first interracial royal marriage ends in failure, Agatha Danbury (Arsema Thomas), a lady-in-waiting, assumes, the Great Experiment might peter out as well. Better known to "Bridgerton" fans as the sage Lady Danbury, Agatha tries to convince Charlotte that she has a responsibility to her people as England's first Black royal. It's a surprisingly hard sell. Coming from a seemingly less stratified milieu, Charlotte has little concept of the hardships that Brits of color face. And, although in possession of a willful imperiousness, she's never had to advocate for anyone besides herself. Charlotte's self-absorption leads the darker-skinned, politically wily Lady Danbury to negotiate directly with Augusta on behalf of England's new peerage class. The series makes the burgeoning friendships and solidarities among women nearly as moving as its central romance, and the ministerial chess match between Augusta and Lady Danbury, who each grapple for influence in ways that are invisible to most men, proves unexpectedly engaging, especially in one toughness-building talk that evokes "Scandal"'s impassioned intolerance for female mediocrity.

There are just enough softhearted men to love these hard-nosed women. The technocratic, astronomy-adoring George resents just as much as any headstrong princess that he is treated like "a royal stud horse trotted out for the chosen mare." He also harbors a (purposefully ill-defined) psychological malady that threatens his reign and leaves him feeling unworthy of his scepter. (It's been hypothesized that the actual George III had bipolar disorder.) Charlotte's long journey toward a patient understanding of her husband's disability—and his acceptance that she can love him despite his condition—makes for a romance that feels undeniably modern.

Unlike most origin stories, "Queen Charlotte" doesn't kill the mystique of its titular character, whose haughty grandeur and rococo hairdos in her dowager years are glimpsed in Regency-era flash-forwards. This later time line, which is also the one in which "Bridgerton" is set, follows Her Majesty and Lady Danbury (played in these scenes by Golda Rosheuvel and Adjoa Andoh) as silver-haired matrons. (Amarteifio and Thomas, the younger actors, wonderfully prefigure the mannerisms of their characters' older selves.) After decades of marriage, George and Charlotte have fifteen children, but no legitimate grandchildren, a situation that imperils their bloodline. The franchise hews to historicity when it wants, and the Queen is forced to reflect on how her dedication to her unwell husband, combined with the social norm of upper-class women relying on hired help to care for their children, may have extinguished her maternal instincts. Elsewhere, Lady Danbury and Violet Bridgerton (Ruth Gemmell), the mother of several children entering the marriage market, strike up an intimate friendship based on their shared sexual and romantic bereftness in widowhood. The characters' middle-aged yearning feels nearly as relevant to today as it does to an era when women past childbearing age were uncertain of what they could be, other than financial burdens on male relatives. "We are untold stories," Lady Danbury muses. Pull up a chair. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2023 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCIX, NO. 13, May 22, 2023. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four planned combined issues, as indicated on the issue's cover, and other combined or extra issues) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Lauren Kamen Macri, vice-president of sales; Rob Novick, vice-president of finance; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue and APAC; Anna Wintour, chief content officer; Samantha Morgan, chief of staff; Sanjay Bhakta, chief product and technology officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail help@newyorker.com. Give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable you are dissatisfied with your subscription, you may receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For advertising inquiries, e-mail adinquiries@condenast.com. For submission guidelines, visit www.newyorker.com. For cover reprints, call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, call (212) 630-5656, or e-mail image_licensing@condenast.com. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenast.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, advise us at P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Pia Guerra and Ian Boothby, must be received by Sunday, May 21st. The finalists in the May 8th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 5th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



"That looks easier on the knees."
Emily Lampshire, Hoboken, N.J.

"No one goes for walks anymore."
David Hunter, Chicago, Ill.

"Look! The first Robinsons of spring."
Alex Jones, Montreal, Quebec

THE WINNING CAPTION

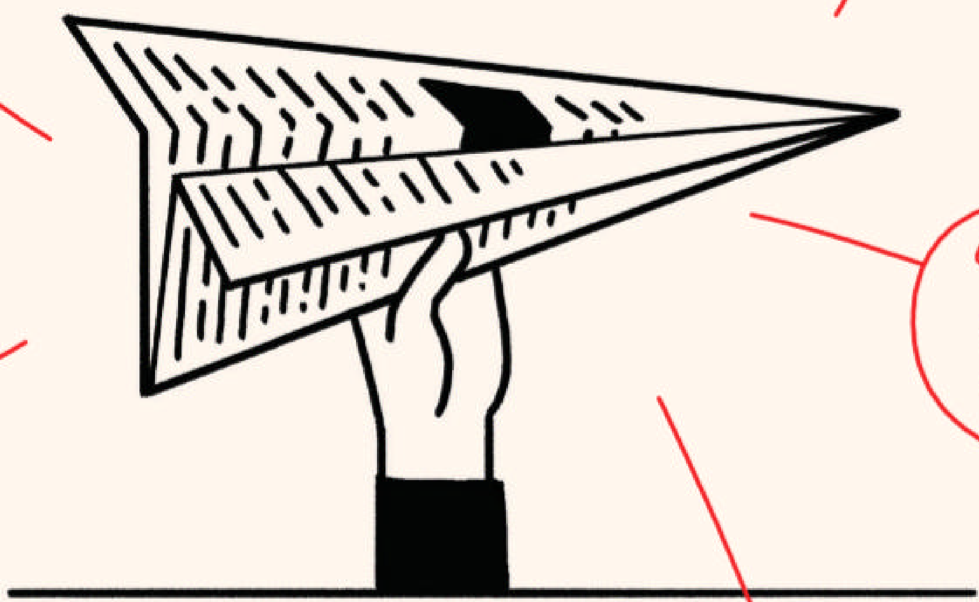


"Now I'm starting to believe the mailman's side of the story."
Kurt Markert, Ann Arbor, Mich.

THE NEW YORKER

The Daily

Reasons to love your in-box again.



Enjoy the best of *The New Yorker* in
the Daily newsletter, curated by our editors.

Sign up now at **newyorker.com/newsletter**

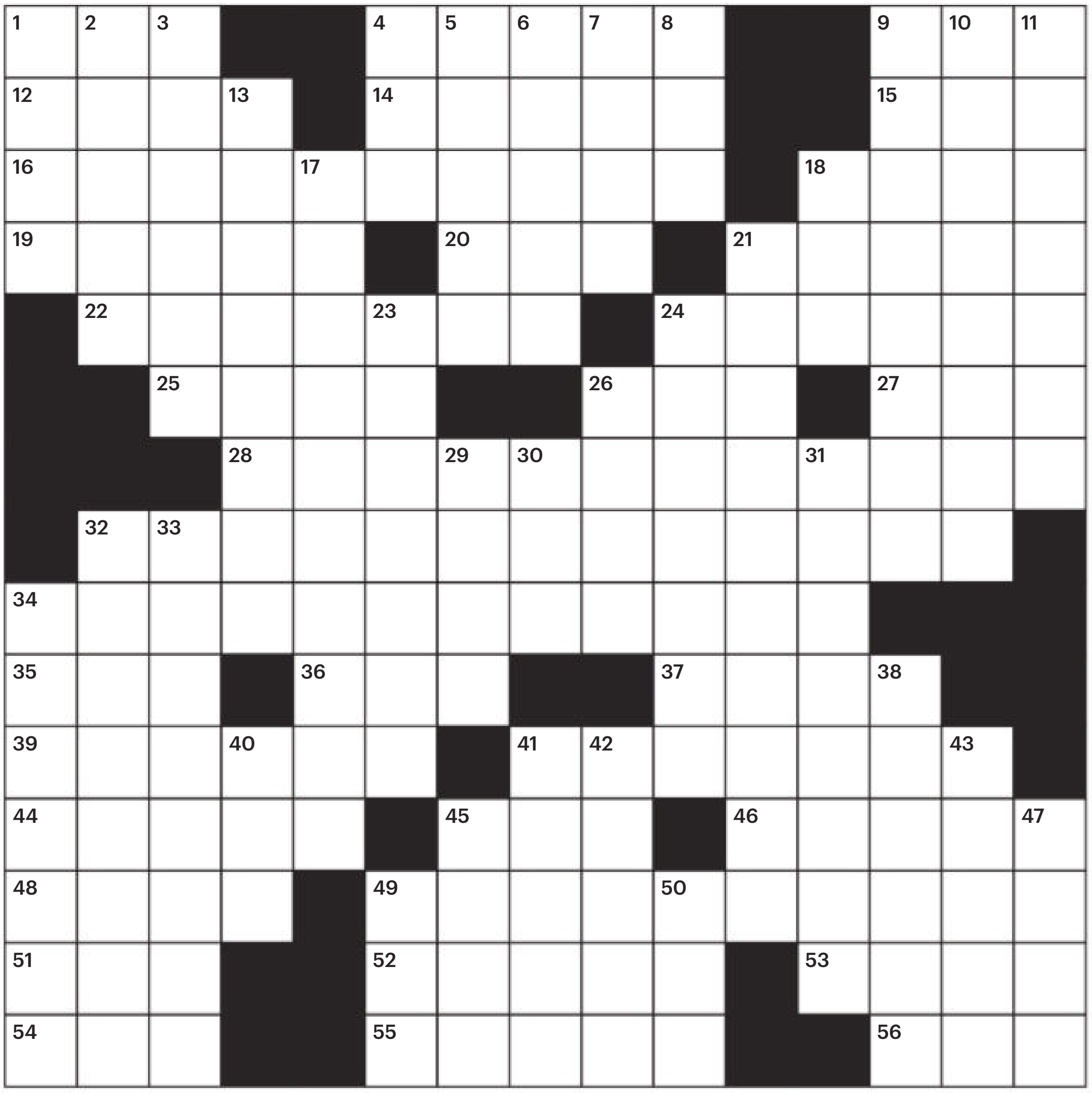
Scan to sign up.

PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A moderately challenging puzzle.

BY ERIK AGARD



ACROSS

1 What many games require
4 Server error?
9 Cookbook abbr.
12 Word after second or helping
14 Discord server's creator, for short
15 Letters before a stage name, perhaps
16 "Can you point me in the right direction?"
18 Short comedic performance
19 Part of a mailing address
20 Mo. of Indigenous Peoples' Day
21 Goes mano a mano with
22 Slightest bit of harm
24 Character who explores Mathmagic Land, in a classic Disney educational cartoon
25 Puente nicknamed the King of Latin Music
26 According to
27 "How Stella Got ___ Groove Back"
28 "What kind of white nonsense . . ."
32 Early W.N.B.A. powerhouse whose logo featured a tail but no animals
34 Blame-deflecting phrase
35 CPR expert
36 Gibbon, e.g.
37 Single-___ tourney
39 Meals during which a door is opened for Elijah
41 Brings into the twenty-first century, say
44 Mental picture
45 Wildebeest
46 Sudden shocks
48 Cranberry-sauce characteristic
49 What might result in standing water?
51 "Whatever," in a text
52 Opposite of division
53 Lead-in to head or thought
54 "Is this not exactly what I said would happen?"
55 Certain wildfowl
56 Dir. from Khartoum to Lagos

DOWN

1 "___ Kiss" (Faith Hill song)
2 Is after
3 Like some plays
4 U.S.D.O.T. agency
5 Impromptu
6 Ann Arbor school, for short
7 Fluffy stuff
8 Demolition material
9 Be negatively affected
10 Things in the kitchen that might be seasoned but aren't eaten
11 Degreases, as a slice of pizza
13 Post-party confetti, for example
17 Cold mugful?
18 Namesake of a day of the week
21 Bodyguards of the Black Panther
23 Footwork drills for a soccer player
24 Made sense of
26 Purple-brown shade
29 Part of an apple or a person
30 Small colony member
31 1996 film about four friends who rob banks
32 One side of a cranberry-sauce debate
33 Defeat with a series of moves
34 Retort that might be followed by an Internet search
38 Chill
40 Ingredient in some bagel recipes
41 Let loose, in a way
42 Parts of most eagles
43 Preps a new jar of nut butter, perhaps
45 Nowhere to be found
47 Gush
49 Target of a spy's sweep
50 Ingredient in some bagel recipes

Solution to the previous puzzle:

N	O	V	E	L	■	S	L	O	P	■	■	E	M	U
E	N	E	R	O	■	T	A	P	E	■	P	R	O	B
P	E	C	O	L	A	B	R	E	E	D	L	O	V	E
H	I	T	S	■	D	E	A	R	R	E	A	D	E	R
E	D	O	■	P	A	D	M	E	■	S	N	I	D	E
W	A	R	G	A	M	E	■	T	W	I	■	B	O	A
■	■	■	E	L	S	■	A	T	A	■	G	L	U	T
S	I	S	T	E	R	B	R	A	C	E	L	E	T	S
O	C	H	S	■	I	A	M	■	K	E	A	■	■	■
L	E	E	■	T	B	D	■	A	I	L	M	E	N	T
I	C	A	R	E	■	T	I	D	E	S	■	L	O	O
T	A	R	O	T	C	A	R	D	S	■	P	I	S	A
U	N	I	V	E	R	S	A	L	T	R	U	T	H	S
D	O	N	E	■	E	T	T	E	■	P	R	E	E	T
E	E	G	■	■	W	E	E	D	■	M	E	S	S	Y

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at
newyorker.com/crossword



AN ORIGINAL DOCUSERIES
FX
HILL THE SECRETS OF SONG
IN ASSOCIATION WITH VANITY FAIR
STREAM ON
5.19 FX | hulu


HERMÈS
PARIS
UN JARDIN
À CYTHÈRE
HERMÈS
PARIS
UN JARDIN
À CYTHÈRE
the sun as perfume